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# SERMONS

ON

# VARIOUS SUBJECTS,

*EVANGELICAL, DEVOTIONAL AND PRACTICAL.*

ADAPTED TO THE PROMOTION OF

## CHRISTIAN PIETY, FAMILY RELIGION, AND YOUTHFUL VIRTUE.

BY JOSEPH LATHROP, D. D.
PASTOR OF THE FIRST CHURCH IN WESTSPRINGFIELD.

*IN FIVE VOLUMES.*

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# CONTENTS.

SERMON I.

Evidences of the Gospel.

SERMON II.

Inscription, Benediction, and general Subject of the the Epistle to the Ephesians.

SERMON III.

Election.

SERMON IV.

Adoption.

SERMON V.

Redemption.

SERMON VI.

The Gospel designed to gather all things into One.

SERMON VII.

The Sealing and Earnest of the Spirit.

SERMON VIII.

Faith, Love, Hope, and the high Prospects, to which believers are enlightened.

SERMON IX.

The Exaltation of Christ.

SERMON X.

The Depravity of Human Nature.

Digitized by Google

SERMON XI.

Believers quickened, raised, and exalted with Christ.

SERMON XII.

Salvation, not by works, but by grace through faith.

SERMON XIII.

The deplorable state of Heathens and Unbelievers.

SERMON XIV.

The Happiness of Believers in Nearness to God.

SERMON XV.

The Nature, Foundation and Design of the Christian Church.

SERMON XVI.

The Mystery of the Gospel revealed to the Apostles for the general benefit of Mankind.

SERMON XVII.

The unsearchable Riches of Christ preached for the instruction of Men and Angels.

SERMON XVIII.

Freedom of Access to God by Faith in Christ.

SERMON XIX.

Saints and Angels one Family.

SERMON XX.

Christ dwelling in the Saints; and the boundless dimensions of his Love to them.

SERMON XXI.

God able to do for us far more than we ask or think.

Digitized by Google

SERMON XXII.

Christian Unity.

SERMON XXIII.

The precious Gifts of Christ's Ascension.

SERMON XXIV.

Christian Stability and Maturity.

SERMON XXV.

Christians to be distinguished from the World.

SERMON XXVI.

Renovation after the Image of God.

SERMON XXVII.

Truth between Man and Man.

SERMON XXVIII.

Meekness in opposition to sinful Anger.

SERMON XXIX.

Justice, Industry, and Charity.

SERMON XXX.

Pure and edifying Conversation.

SERMON XXXI.

Against Grieving the Spirit.

SERMON XXXII.

Kindness, Compassion and Forgiveness, in opposition to Bitterness, Wrath and Evil speaking.

SERMON XXXIII.

Imitation of the Love of God.

SERMON XXXIV.

Against Impurity, Avarice and foolish Jesting.

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SERMON XXXV.

Against Fellowship in unfruitful works.

SERMON XXXVI.

Sleeping Sinners called to awake.

SERMON XXXVII.

Christian Circumspection.

SERMON XXXVIII.

Redemption of Time.

SERMON XXXIX.

Temperance.

SERMON XL.

Believers to be filled with the Spirit.

SERMON XLI.

Christian Psalmody.

SERMON XLII.

Thanksgiving.

SERMON XLIII.

Mutual Submission.

SERMON XLIV.

Duties of Husbands and Wives.

SERMON XLV.

Duties of Parents and Children.

SERMON XLVI.

Duties of Masters and Servants.

SERMON XLVII.

The Christian Warfare.

Digitized by Google

SERMON XLVIII.

Prayer and Intercession.

SERMON XLIX.

Paul's Intention in sending Tychicus to Ephesus.

SERMON L.

Sincere Love to Christ.

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# SERMON I.

## *An* INTRODUCTORY SERMON *on the* EVIDENCES *of the* GOSPEL.

ACTS xxvi. 16, 17.

*I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of those things which thou hast seen, and of those in which I will appear unto thee, delivering thee from the people and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee ;——.*

PAUL, in the preceding verses, declares before Agrippa the time and manner of his conversion to the faith of Christ, and the extraordinary circumstances which attended it. And, in the words now read, he subjoins an account of the commission, which he received from Christ, to preach his gospel among the Jews, and especially among the Gentiles.

The singular method, which Jesus took to convince Paul of the truth of the gospel, was not out of partial favor to him, for surely he had done nothing to recom-



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ment himself, but rather out of a general benevolence to mankind; for this man was a chosen vessel—a suitable instrument to convey Christ's name among them. Jesus miraculously appeared to him to make him a minister of the gospel, and a witness of those facts by which its truth is supported. And having furnished him for his work, Jesus sent him forth to publish the doctrines, and display the evidences of the gospel among the people of the Jews, and among the Heathen nations.

The words teach us, that "the Apostle Paul was a notable and illustrious instrument in spreading the knowledge and confirming the truth of the religion of Christ." Such he appears from the history given of him in the Acts of the Apostles, and from the writings which he himself has left for the use of the church.

My design is to give a summary view of the evidences of Christianity, and particularly to illustrate the evidences derived from the conversion, preaching and writings of this eminent minister and witness.

The Christian religion does now exist, and for many ages it has existed in the world. To account for its existence, without admitting its truth, it is impossible: For it did not take place by the influence of human authority, or the terror of military power, but by familiar instructions and obvious miracles. The credit of it depends on these plain facts—that about eighteen hundred years ago, there arose in Judea an extraordinary person, called Jesus of Nazareth, who declared himself to be divinely sent into the world, as an instructor, reformer and Saviour of men—that he lived a most virtuous and holy life—that he taught a religion in some respects new, in many respects more perfect than had ever been taught before, and in all respects pure and excellent—that he wrought many great and astonishing miracles—that he foretold many things, humanly improbable, which were verified by events—that he suffered death by a public crucifixion, and, on the third day,

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rose again, and appeared to many in different times and places, not only to single persons, but to companies, and to more than five hundred at once, and frequently to those who had most intimately known him before his death, and who consequently could not mistake another person for him—that after about forty days, he, in the presence of a large concourse of disciples, visibly ascended on high, and disappeared from the admiring spectators—that, soon after this, according to his previous promise, the disciples whom he had chosen to be the witnesses of his works and the ministers of his word, were endued with extraordinary gifts, qualifying them to go forth and proclaim his religion in the world.

If such *facts as these* did really exist, the religion of *the gospel* is indubitably true. They who disbelieve the gospel, must deny that there ever was such a man, or that he ever wrought such miracles, and died and rose again in the manner alledged.

Miracles, which are effects produced above the common powers, and in a way different from the stated course of nature, plainly discover God's immediate interposition. From the goodness and veracity of God, we may conclude, that he never will immediately interpose to give such credibility to a falsehood, that men, inquiring honestly, and judging rationally, must receive it as a truth.

The miracles of Christ, (admitting, for the present, the Christian history to be true) were great and numerous; and he constantly appealed to them as evidences of the divinity of his mission and doctrines. To suppose, that, in such a case, God should enable an impostor to perform these marvellous works, which are related of Jesus, is contrary to all our ideas of the divine character.

They who saw Christ heal the sick, raise the dead, cast out devils, and still the storms—they who saw him yield himself to death, and then, exactly according to

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his prediction, return from the grave, ascend into heaven, and shed down on his disciples the promised gifts of his spirit—especially they who felt themselves partakers of those wonderful gifts, could not doubt, but that he was, what he declared himself to be, the Son of God and the Saviour of men, and that his religion was a heavenly institution.

The disciples of Jesus, (allowing that there were such persons) were credible witnesses of these facts; for they related them as matters which fell under their own observation. That which they saw and heard, they declared to the world. Whether they really saw the dead arise, the sick and lame restored to health and soundness, thousands fed with a few small loaves; whether they themselves were able to work miracles and speak with divers tongues; whether Jesus, who was crucified, actually arose and appeared to them; whether they conversed with him, saw his wounds and heard his instructions; were facts in which they could not be deceived. If, then, their relation was not true, they must have intended to deceive mankind.

But it is not conceivable, that they should have such a dishonest intention: For by their testimony to the miracles and resurrection of Christ, they exposed themselves to poverty, reproach, misery and death. And it cannot be imagined, that a number of men should deliberately associate to sacrifice every thing that is dear in life, and even life itself, for the sake of imposing on the world a falsehood, which never would do mankind or themselves any good—that they should persevere in this design after they began to feel its consequences—that they should persist in it until death that never a single man should desert the cause and discover the fraud. This would surpass all miracles.

If their design had been a fraud, it might, in the time of it, have been easily detected and suppressed.

The facts, which they relate, they declared, were done publicly and recently, and that they were known

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and remembered by many then living. If there had been no such person as Jesus Christ, or if he had performed no such miracles as are ascribed to him; no credit would have been given to their report.

The disciples of Jesus had enemies who wished to confound them. The Jewish rulers spared no pains to suppress the Christian cause. Their enmity to it would have excited them to convict the witnesses of falsehood, if they had not known that the facts asserted were indisputable. If they had discovered any fraud, they would immediately have made it public. As they never denied the facts, but only studied to evade the conclusion drawn from them, they must have been convinced, that the facts themselves were undeniable.

These *witnesses* have left a written testimony, which has come down to us with every desirable circumstance of credibility.

There are four men who have professedly written distinct histories of the life, ministry and works of Jesus Christ. Two of them, Matthew and John, were his attendant disciples from the beginning to the end of his public life. The other two, Mark and Luke, were contemporary and conversant with his disciples. Four others, Peter, James, Jude and Paul, have written epistles to particular societies of Christians, or to Christians in general. In these epistles, they recognize the character, assert, or allude to the miracles, and teach the doctrines of Jesus, in substance, as they are related by the before mentioned historians. Three of these letter writers were Christ's disciples. The last was a contemporary Jew, a man of uncommon zeal, learning and ability; much conversant in public affairs; for a while an enemy to Christianity, but afterward converted to the belief of it. So that the Christian history stands on the credit of eight different persons, most of them disciples, and all of them contemporaries of Christ. They wrote separately, on different occasions, without any appearance of concert; and yet they all substantially

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agree. These writings were received as genuine in the time when the authors lived, and in the next succeeding age, and from age to age, ever since, down to the present time. There is no ancient history extant, which is so completely authenticated.

The conversion, ministry and epistles of the Apostle Paul afford strong and undeniable evidence of the truth of the Christian religion. To these I shall now pay particular attention.

The account, which we have of him, is given by Luke in his history of the Acts of the Apostles. This Luke appears to have been a man of learning; such his writings shew him to be. He was an esteemed and eminent physician—so Paul calls him. He was admitted to an acquaintance with men of the first distinction; as appears by the dedication of his works to the most excellent Theophilus. He was highly regarded among the Christians of his time, and his praise for the gospel which he wrote, was in all the churches. He was an intimate companion of St. Paul, and accompanied him for a considerable time in his travels. From him we have particular information concerning Paul's early life, remarkable conversion, and subsequent conduct: And every thing related by Luke we find confirmed in the writings of Paul himself.

Paul, who was a Jew by nation, had been educated in the rigid principles of the sect called Pharisees, and formed to eminent learning in the celebrated school of Gamaliel. He was a man of distinction among his countrymen, and famous for his zeal in opposing Christianity. His worldly interest and preferment, the sentiments imbibed from his education, and the prevalent opinion of the Jewish rulers and priests, all concurred to fill him with violent prejudices against the gospel of Christ. In human view, no man was more unlikely than he, to be converted to the belief of it; and no time was more unpromising for his conversion than that in which it took place. He had just consented to,

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and assisted in the execution of an eminent preacher of the gospel. Breathing out threatening and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, he had sought and obtained from the Jewish high priest a commission to bind and bring to Jerusalem for public punishment all, both men and women, whom he found professing the faith of Jesus Christ. And for the execution of this bloody commission, he was now going to Damascus. His zeal against the gospel was, at this time, wound up to the highest strain. Who would suspect, that this man should become a Christian?—But so it was: When he came near to Damascus, he was, at noon day, suddenly surprized with a light from heaven, far exceeding the brightness of the sun. This was followed with an *articulate voice*, calling him by name, expostulating with him for his persecution of the church of Christ, and warning him of the ruin which he would bring on himself. Struck with conviction of his guilt, Paul inquired, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" The same voice directed him to proceed on his journey into the city, where he should meet with instructions adapted to his case. In consequence of this vision he fell blind. He was led by some of the company which attended him, into the city. There he spent his time in prayer. After some days a Christian disciple came to him, related to him the purpose of the vision, and restored him to his sight by laying his hands on him in the name of Christ. Soon after this, Paul became a preacher of the gospel. That this wonderful scene was real, and not imaginary, no man can reasonably doubt.

There is nothing, in Paul's conduct or writings, that savours of fanaticism: But, on the contrary, he uniformly appears to have possessed a good understanding and a sound judgment. If he had been an enthusiast, yet he never would have fancied a revelation in opposition to his religious principles, his worldly interest, and all his strong prejudices. Enthusiasm never takes

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this turn, but always falls in with some previous passion, interest or humour.

Paul was now actually engaged in a design to extirpate Christianity, and he was persuaded, that his design was laudable. If he had been a fanatic, he might have fancied a revelation in favor of his design; but it was impossible that imagination should create a light and voice in direct opposition to a design, which he had so much at heart, and which he thought so pious.

Besides: This whole scene was open and public, and attended with none of those circumstances of secrecy and disguise, which usually attend the revelations of enthusiasts and impostors. It took place, not in the night, but in full day—not in a private apartment, or retired desert, but in the high road, and near a populous city—not when Paul was alone, but when he was in the company of a number of people, who all saw the light and heard the voice, as well as he, though they understood not the words which were spoken. And these were not Christians, but enemies to Christianity, as well as he.

Nothing can be more absurd, than to suppose, that a number of men, all violent opposers of the gospel should happen, all at the same moment, to fancy, that they saw a light, and heard a voice in confirmation of the gospel, and that one of them fell blind, and continued so for several days, if no such thing had taken place.

That this story was not a fiction of the writer, but a fact fully believed by him, is as evident, as any ancient historical fact can possibly be. It is publicly asserted by Luke soon after it is said to have happened; and the time, place and circumstances are pointed out; so that it might easily have been disproved, if it had not been true. Paul himself, in two of his public defences, and in the presence of numbers of Jews, relates the story, and appeals to it as a proof of his Apostleship, which he would not have done, if there had not

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been full evidence of the truth of it. He alludes to it also *in* several of his epistles, which shews, that it was then fully believed in the churches.

This vision produced in Paul a mighty change. From this time he became a firm, unwavering believer, and a zealous, intrepid preacher of the gospel. He openly professed his faith, that Jesus was the Son of God; and he immediately received baptism, the instituted badge of discipleship. And, being divinely instructed, that he was appointed a minister and witness of Jesus, he straightway preached him in Damascus, proving that he was the very Christ foretold by the prophets. From Damascus, where he first began his ministry, and where *he* soon found his life in danger, he *privately* escaped to Jerusalem. There he joined *the other* Apostles, and spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus. Afterward, being ordained by certain prophets and teachers of the church as an Apostle of the Gentiles, he travelled through the various provinces of the lesser Asia: Then he passed into Europe and visited the most noted places in ancient Greece: From thence he went into Syria, and returned to Jerusalem. Afterwards he went over a considerable part of the same ground again, confirming the churches, which he had planted.

Wherever he went, he boldly preached this new religion in the most conspicuous places, especially in the Jewish synagogues; for there were Jews dispersed in all parts of the Roman empire. In many places he met with great opposition, chiefly from the malice of the Jews. He was imprisoned, tortured, whipped, stoned, and once handled so violently that he fell, and was dragged away for dead. But none of these things moved him, neither counted he his own life dear to him, that so he might finish with joy the ministry which he had received. God wrought special miracles by his hands in expelling evil spirits, healing the sick and raising the dead. In many places, churches under his



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ministry were planted, improved and increased to great celebrity. Thus he continued his work, until he was made a prisoner at Rome, where he remained two years, confined to his own hired house; yet with so much liberty, that he received all who came to him, preaching to them the kingdom of God, and testifying the things which concern the Lord Jesus, with all confidence.

Paul could not have conducted in this manner, if he had not believed the gospel to be divine. He could not have had such great success, if he had not exhibited evidence of its divinity. The miracles, which he wrought, confirmed the testimony which he gave in its favor.

And certainly Luke's narrative of these matters must have been true, or it never could have gained credit, nor would he have thought of writing it. For, it should be observed, this is not a narrative of Paul's *private life*, but of his *public ministry*. If Paul had never performed such travels, preached in such places, erected such churches, wrought such miracles, met with such persecutions, stood before such councils and magistrates, and made such speeches in his public defence, the historian, who should relate these things as recently done, would have gained no credit, but must have met with perfect contempt.

There are thirteen epistles ascribed to this Paul; and whoever reads them with attention, will easily see, that they were written by the same man, whose life and actions Luke has related to us. They breathe the spirit of that celebrated preacher; they contain the same doctrines, which, Luke says, Paul preached; and they narrate, or allude to the same transactions, which the historian has ascribed to him. If you read Luke's history, and Paul's letters, you will see, there is no collusion—no combination to support each other's credit. But yet there is a remarkable coincidence of facts; a coincidence which is worthy of notice, as it

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strongly confirms the credit of both writers. For where two men write independently, in a different manner, on *different* occasions, and without concert, their agreement in the relation of facts must be supposed to spring from truth.

Paul's early sentiments and manner of life—his persecution of the church—his conversion—his preaching in Damascus—his danger in, and escape from that city—his sufferings—the places to which he carried the gospel—the success, and the opposition which he found in them—his assistance from other Apostles—his imprisonments—his selfdenials—his labors for his own support—his constancy and perseverance—his miraculous works are represented in his epistles, as they are related *in the history* of the Acts, with only this *difference*; Luke relates them with the freedom and boldness of an historian writing of another man; Paul alludes to them with the modesty, or appeals to them with the reluctance of an honest man constrained to speak of himself.

Any discerning person, reading the writings of the New Testament, and comparing them together, will find decisive evidence of their genuineness and authenticity.

But we have still farther evidence in their favor.

Every man, in the least acquainted with history, knows, that, in the time when the books of the New Testament are supposed to have been written, there were those persons who are here mentioned; as Augustus, Tiberius, Claudius, Herod, Pilate, Felix, Festus, Caiaphas, and many others: And that there were those sects and classes of men, which are here described; as Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes and Herodians: And that there were those customs and usages, which are here related; as the feasts of the passover and penticost, the ceremony of circumcision, a great strictness in observing the Sabbath, and in reading the law. It is well known that the Jews were under the Roman

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government, paid tribute to the Emperor, received their chief magistrates by his appointment, could put no man to death without his permission; and many other things too numerous to be here mentioned.

Now if the writings of the New Testament exhibit a true account of the state of things in that age, we must believe they were extant in, or near, that age. And if the authors have strictly regarded the truth in every thing else, why should their veracity be questioned, in things which concern the Lord Jesus. If we believe there were such men as Cæsar, Herod and Pilate, who performed the works ascribed to them, Why may we not believe, there was such a person as *Jesus Christ*, who performed the works ascribed to *him*?

That there was an extraordinary person called by this name, who did many wonderful things, and was put to death under Tiberius; and that there was such a sect as Christians, denominated from him, which made a great noise, and became very numerous in the world, soon after the death of their founder, we have evidence from Heathen, as well as Christian writers.

The books of the New Testament were early received as the genuine works of the men whose names they bear; and in this character they have been handed down to the present time. Of this we have as good evidence as we have of any ancient facts. Writers who flourished soon after the Apostles, and who were conversant with *them*, or with their immediate disciples, can even now, at this distance of time, be produced as witnesses of the genuineness of almost all the books of the New Testament; as the four Gospels, the Acts, thirteen Epistles of Paul, the first of Peter, and the first of John. And writers but little later bear witness to the authority of them all.

A certain writer named *Papias*, who lived soon after the Apostles, and was conversant with their immediate disciples, is quoted by *Eusebius*, a church historian, in confirmation of the gospel of *Matthew*. *Justin*, *Irenæ-*

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ss and *Clement* of Alexandria, who wrote about the middle of the second century, quote several passages out of *Mark's* gospel, and prove that he wrote it, and that it was seen and commended by the Apostle *Peter*. *Paul* himself has given his sanction to *Luke's* gospel, by quoting a passage from it in his first epistle to Timothy. The ancients generally apply to *Luke* those words of Paul to the Corinthians, "We have sent the brother, whose praise is in the gospel through all the churches." *Origen* declares, that *Luke's* gospel was approved by *Paul*. It is quoted by *Justin* and others in the second century, near the times of the Apostles. *Irenæus*, who was acquainted with *Polycarp*, a disciple of the Apostle *John*, has with great accuracy proved the genuineness of the gospel received under the name of that Apostle. Several other early fathers ascribe it to him, and say, that the authority of it was never controverted in the church. *Eusebius* informs us that *John* read and approved the gospels of *Matthew*, *Mark* and *Luke*, and added his own as a supplement to them. The book called *the Acts of the Apostles*, compared with *Luke's* gospel, appears to have been written by the same author. All the ancients agree that it was composed by *Luke*, and received in the church as an authentic history. As such it is quoted by *Clement* of Rome, who was a companion with Paul; by *Papias*, who conversed with men of the Apostles' times; by *Polycarp*, who was John's disciple; and by *Irenæus*, who lived in the second century.

Thirteen of *Paul's* epistles, with the first of *Peter*, and the first of *John*, were never questioned; for there were particular churches, or persons, to whom all the originals, except the two last mentioned epistles, were directed. These originals were carefully preserved in the churches which received them, as *Tertullian* says, down to his time: which was the third century. They were acknowledged, without hesitancy, by the whole Christian church, as *Clement* and *Origen* affirm. They

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were cited as Paul's epistles, in the very age in which they were written, and in the next succeeding age, and so on in every age since.

The epistle to the *Hebrews*, that of *James*, and that of *Jude*, the second of *Peter*, the second and third of *John*, and the *Revelation*, were not, at first, universally received: But we find, by the testimony of a number of the before mentioned fathers, that, after some inquiry, they were admitted as genuine and authentic in the earliest times. As these books were written either to Christians dispersed abroad, or to private persons, it was not so easy at once to ascertain their authority, as it was that of the other books, which were directed to particular churches; for there the author's handwriting, and the character of the messengers who brought them, were well known, and there they were immediately and repeatedly read.

The caution with which the churches received some of the books of the present canon, shews that, in this important matter, they did not act with a hasty credulity, but with a just concern to avoid imposition. So that the canon of the New Testament stands on better footing, than if no doubts had arisen about any part of it.

Not only were these books universally received by Christians of the early ages, but publicly read in the churches. Paul orders his first epistle to the Thessalonians to be read to all the holy brethren; and his epistle to the Colossians to be communicated to the church of the Laodiceans. And Peter, in his second epistle, signifies, that Paul had written a number of epistles, which were generally known in the churches. Justin Martyr, in a book which he wrote about forty years after the Apostolic age, speaks of the writings of the Apostles, as read every Sabbath in the Christian congregations.

From these testimonies it appears, that the books of the New Testament were, in that age in which they were written, and in the next succeeding age, received

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as the genuine works of the men whose names they bear. And from age to age the testimonies of their reception became more and more numerous. Yea, we *find*, within about fifty years after the Apostles, the testimonies of heathens and infidels, that there were such books extant as those which we now receive, and that these books were acknowledged and revered by Christians.

These writings were, early, probably within forty or fifty years after Christ's ascension, collected into a volume, and treated by Christians with peculiar marks of faith and reverence.

Now if these books had not been genuine, it is impossible that they *should have* gained such universal credit a*mong Christians*. If there had been no such *men known* as their reputed authors, they never could have obtained any credit at all. The authors appear under appropriate names and characters, call themselves apostles and disciples of Jesus; relate many remarkable facts as then recent and notorious; mention many miraculous works performed, and supernatural gifts exercised by them, in such places, and in the presence of such persons and churches; appeal to the public for the truth of many of the facts related; represent themselves and other apostles as having been present in those places, and there preached, wrought miracles, made converts, formed churches, and imparted supernatural gifts. Now it is impossible that any persons, especially societies, should have received these books, if they had never seen such men, known such facts, or heard of such churches. Every one who saw the writings would naturally inquire, Where are the churches which are here addressed? Who are the *men* that speak of themselves as so generally known? Who has ever been acquainted with the matters which they relate with so much assurance? Ask yourselves: Would the history of the late American war, and the revolution which followed, be received with any regard

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among the people of America in the present age, if no such events had taken place? Or would such a fictitious history go down with credit to succeeding ages? The reception of a history relating to facts of recent existence and public notoriety, is an evidence of its truth.

If any man doubts the genuineness of these books, let him say when they were forged. It was not while the apostles were living; for they would have detected, and suppressed, the fraud. It was not after their death; for then the cheat would not have succeeded. The books pretend to have been sent abroad by the authors, themselves. Paul's epistles, for example, profess to have been written by him, at such a time, and in such a place; to have been sent to such churches, by such messengers; and to have been signed by his own hand. Now if these churches had never received such letters, or seen such messengers, or if Christians in general had never heard of such writings, until some years after they pretend to have been sent abroad and publicly read; this would have been a sufficient reason never to have admitted them.

Most of Paul's epistles were written to noted churches in populous cities; and, consequently, if they were genuine, they must have been known before his death. If they had not appeared until after his death, the churches to which they pretend to have been sent, would have declared, they never received them, and thus have exposed the deception.

In short, if we suppose the books of the New Testament to be spurious, we must suppose, that the Christians, in the Apostolic and succeeding ages, among whom were many learned, and, doubtless, many honest men, did all, in the several different countries of Christendom, without any conceivable motive, confederate in a fraud, and agree to impose on the world. A supposition this, which, if admitted, puts an end to all historical credit.

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Besides; as one well observes, "It is easy to discover the writings of the New Testament, particularly Paul's epistles, to be original. His very soul speaks *in all* his writings. There is that undissembled zeal for the glory of God and the salvation of mankind; that courage—that disregard to his own interest, when it interfered with higher views—that boldness of expression—that life and spirit which are hard to be counterfeited. The same force and energy, which animated all his actions, and empowered him to spread the gospel from east to west, ennobles all his compositions; and it would be almost as impossible for an impostor to write as Paul did, as it would be to act as he did. It is very difficult to personate such a warm, affectionate *and interesting* writer. There is an exact *resemblance* in his speeches and in his epistles. In *both* there is the same greatness of spirit, the same glowing language, the same elevated thoughts, warm from the heart. In both, he speaks and writes with too animated a zeal, to be a cold deceiver; with too much sense, solidity and consistence, to be an enthusiast."

Of our preceding reasonings this is the result;

THE RELIGION OF THE GOSPEL IS DIVINE.

This religion, if it be divine, must be supremely important. Do you believe, that God has sent into the world a Saviour from heaven—has borne witness to him by miracles and wonders—has subjected him to death for our redemption, and raised him from the dead by his mighty power—has given support to the religion which this Saviour taught, and by a wonderful providence has conveyed it down to our day with full evidence of its heavenly origin? Do you believe all this?—Surely you must believe, that this is a religion in which mankind are infinitely concerned.—Come forward then; make an open profession of it, and tell the world, you are not ashamed of it.



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Faithfully attend on the instituted worship of God. This is a great security against irreligion and infidelity. That christians may hold fast the profession of their faith, the Apostle enjoins them to keep up their religious assemblies.

Be solicitous to obtain a share in the great blessings, which this religion offers to you. Seek pardon and glory, in the way which it prescribes, by repentance of sin and faith in the redeemer. There is no other name by which you can be saved.

Endeavor to extend the knowledge, advance the honor and promote the success of the gospel; put to silence the ignorance of foolish men; confirm them who waver; strengthen such as are weak; encourage the young and tender, and guard them against the instructions which cause to err. If you ask, How this shall be done?—Take the apostle's advice, "Only let your conversation be, as it becometh the gospel of Christ."

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# SERMON II.

## *Inscription, Benediction, and general subject of the Epistle to the Ephesians.*

EPHESIANS i. 1, 2, 3.

*Paul, an Apostle of Jesus Christ, by the will of God to the saints which are in Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus. Grace be to you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.*

EPHESUS, the city in which the church here addressed was collected, was the metropolis of *Lesser Asia*; and, lying on the sea coast, it was a place of considerable trade. The Greeks inhabiting this city were zealous idolaters. They are said, in the 19th Chapter of the Acts, to be "worshippers of the great goddess Diana, and of the image that fell down from Jupiter." In this city stood the temple of Diana, which, for its grandeur and magnificence, was considered as one of the wonders of the world. The *Ephesians* were also celebrated for their skill in the arts of magic and divination, as we find in the Chapter before cited. And from this epistle of Paul, we learn, that they were also infamous for luxury, lasciviousness and all uncleanness. In this city dwelt great numbers of Jews, who had a synagogue here for divine worship, in which Paul preached for several months. This is the first account, which we have, of the publication of

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the gospel in this city. After his departure, Apollos, who was an eloquent man and mighty in the scriptures, came to *Ephesus*. He had been educated in the Jewish religion; but having lately been instructed in the way of the Lord, he came and taught it diligently in the synagogue. Paul, not long after this, returning to Ephesus, preached there above two years together; "So that not only the *Ephesians*, but all who dwelt in *Asia* heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks; and God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul. And the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified; and many believed, and came and confessed their evil deeds; and the word of the Lord mightily grew and prevailed."

Sometime after Paul's departure from *Ephesus*, we find that he was sent a prisoner to *Rome*. In his confinement he wrote several epistles to churches and christian friends; and, among others, this to the church of *Ephesus*; for he calls himself, Chap. iv. *the prisoner of Jesus Christ for the Gentiles*.

He directs this letter *to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus*, i. e. not only to those in *Ephesus* who had believed, but to those in other parts of *Asia*, who had heard the word of the gospel from him, while he was preaching in that city. So he orders his epistle to the *Colossians* to be read also in the church of the *Laodiceans*.

The design of this epistle is more fully to instruct them in the nature of that gospel, which they had received to guard them against certain errors, to which they were exposed from the influence and example of unbelieving Jews and Gentiles; and to inculcate upon them the importance of a conversation becoming their faith and profession. It contains the substance of the Gospel: And one who reads and understands it, will have good acquaintance with that religion which Paul taught in all his epistles and discourses.

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I intend, if providence shall give me opportunity, to illustrate and improve this whole epistle; in doing which I shall lay before you a system of christian doctrines and precepts in the order and connexion in which the Apostle has arranged them.

At present I shall confine myself to the words which have been read.

Paul here calls himself *an Apostle of Jesus Christ.* The word *Apostle* signifies a messenger *sent* on some particular business. Jesus Christ is called an *Apostle*, because he was *sent* of God to instruct and redeem mankind. Paul and others are called *Apostles*, because they were *sent* of Christ to teach the doctrines which they had received from him. To the eleven disciples, after his resurrection, he says, "As the Father hath sent me, so send I you. All power is given me in heaven and in earth. Go teach, or *proselyte*, all nations, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." Their commission did not confine them within any prescribed limits, as did the commission of those whom the Apostles ordained over particular churches; but it authorized them to go forth and spread the gospel in all parts of the world; and to confirm this extensive commission, as well as to give their ministry success. Christ, according to this promise, wrought with them, and established their word with signs following.

Paul says, He was an Apostle *by the will of God.* In his epistle to the Galatians he styles himself, *an Apostle, not of man, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father.* He received not his call or commission from man, nor was he, as *Matthias* was, chosen to his Apostleship by men; but he was called by *Jesus Christ*, who in person appeared to him for this end, that he might send him among the Gentiles; and by *God the Father*, who revealed his Son in him, and chose him that he should know his will, and be a witness of the truth unto all men.

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But though he was called of God by revelation, yet it was not a *secret* revelation known only to himself, like the revelations on which enthusiasts and impostors ground their pretensions; but it was a revelation made in the most open and public manner, attended with a voice from heaven, and a light which outshone the sun at noonday, and exhibited in the midst of a number of people to whom he could appeal as witnesses of the extraordinary scene.

Notwithstanding this heavenly vision, Paul entered not on the execution of his apostolic office, nor once presumed to preach the gospel, till Ananias came to him, and, laying his hands on him, declared, that God had chosen him to bear Christ's name among the Gentiles. The truth of this declaration Ananias confirmed by a sudden and miraculous restoration of Paul to his sight. Nor was he received by the Apostles at Jerusalem, until he was recommended to them by the testimony of Barnabas, who had been intimately acquainted with these previous transactions. Nor did he, after all, go forth to execute his commission among the *Gentiles*, until the elders of the church at Antioch had solemnly separated him to this work by fasting, and prayer, and the imposition of their hands.

The great business of Paul and the other Apostles was to diffuse the knowledge of the gospel, and plant churches in various parts of the world. And when a competent number of believers were collected in a particular place, some meet person was usually ordained to reside among them as a stated teacher. Accordingly we find Timothy ordained over this church of Ephesus, by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery, of which Paul himself was one. And the authority which Timothy had thus received, the same he was ordered to commit to faithful men, who should be able to teach others; and he was cautioned to lay hands suddenly on no man.

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Paul was an Apostle according to the will of God, as he was called to, and furnished for the work of an Apostle by revelation from God, and as he was introduced into the apostolic office in an open and solemn manner, according to the institution of God.

Paul directs this epistle to the *saints and faithful*. By the same, or similar appellations, he in most of his epistles, addresses the churches of Christians.

We cannot suppose that he intends by these terms to declare *all* the members of this, or any other particular church, to be godly persons; for this, in fact, was not the state of any church. In all the churches founded by the Apostles, there were many who, after some time, discovered the corruption and wickedness of their hearts. The phrases rather denote, that they had been called out of the world, and separated from others, that they might be a peculiar people unto God. The words, *saints, faithful, brethren, disciples, christians*, are often used in a general sense, to express men's visible, professed characters, rather than any certain judgment concerning the habitual temper of their hearts. The sabbath, the temple, its utensils, and the ground on which it stood, are called *holy*, because they were separated from a common, to a sacred use. The nation of the Jews, corrupt as it was, is called a *holy nation*, because it was separated from other nations for the service of the true God. So the Christian church is called *a holy nation, a peculiar people, to shew forth the praises of him, who had called them out of darkness into his marvellous light*. In many places the word *saints* stands opposed, not to unsound Christians, but to heathens.

However, though the Apostle does not, by these terms, declare, that the Ephesian professors were all pure in their hearts, yet he taught them, and he teaches us, that all *ought* to be so. We are *called* to be holy; we are brought to the enjoyment of gospel hopes and privileges, that we might serve God in new-

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ness of spirit—that we might not be conformed to this world, but, being transformed by the renewing of our mind, might prove what is the acceptable will of God.

The religion which we profess, contains the highest motives to purity of heart and life. If content with a verbal profession of, and external compliance with, this religion, we regard iniquity in our hearts, we are guilty of the vilest prevarication; and our religion, instead of saving us, will but plunge us the deeper into infamy and misery. That which is the visible, ought to be the real character of Christians; *saints and faithful in Christ Jesus.*

The Apostle in the next place, expresses his fervent desire, that these Ephesians might receive *grace and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.* Under these general terms are comprehended all the glorious blessings, which are revealed and offered in the gospel.

*Grace* signifies *free, undeserved favor.* Such are all the blessings which we receive through Christ. If we deserved, or could claim them from the justice of God, on the foot of our own works, there would have been no need of the interposition of a Saviour. He came only to save them who are lost.

The *pardon of sin* is grace; for it is the remission of a deserved punishment. "The wages of sin is death."

*Eternal life* is grace, for it is a happiness of which we are utterly unworthy. "They who receive abundance of grace reign in life by Jesus Christ."

The *influences of the divine spirit* are grace; for they are first granted without any good dispositions on our part to invite them; they are continued even after repeated oppositions; they prepare us for that world of glory, for which we never should qualify ourselves.

These blessings come to us *through Christ.* They are the fruits of his atonement and mediation. But

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still they are the fruits of God's grace, as much as if he had bestowed them absolutely, and without this wonderful purchase; for the gift of the Saviour is the consequence of the grace of God, "Who so loved the world, that he sent his only begotten Son, that we might live through him."

The Apostle wishes to the Ephesians *peace*, as well as grace. By *this* we are to understand that *peace of mind*, which arises from a persuasion of our interest in the favor of God. Our peace with *God* is immediately connected with our faith in Christ. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God." Our peace of *mind* is connected with our knowledge of the sincerity of faith. "If our heart condemn us not, we have confidence toward God." The sincerity of our faith *is* proved by the fruits of it in our lives. The way to enjoy peace, is to increase in all holy dispositions, and to abound in every good work.

If the Apostle wished grace and peace to Christians, surely *they* should feel some solicitude to enjoy them. You think your minister should be concerned for the happiness of his people; but ought not every one rather to be concerned for his own? You censure the coldness which you observe in the teachers of religion; you wish they were more zealous and animated: And will you at the same time neglect the means of religion, which you enjoy? You would have others take more pains for your salvation: And will you take no pains for your own? Let every man give diligence for himself, that he may obtain grace and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Apostle, in the words which follow, expresses a strong and lively sense of gratitude for the rich and inestimable blessings granted through Christ to an unworthy race. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places*, or in heavenly things, *in Christ.*



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The common blessings of providence, as food and raiment, health and liberty, are valuable for the present, and call for daily returns of praise. But these are only temporal and earthly goods. The blessings revealed in the gospel, and dispensed to us through Christ, are of a different nature and of higher importance. They are called *spiritual* and *heavenly* things. They are accommodated to our spiritual wants and desires—they come down from heaven, prepare us for heaven, and will be completed in our admission to heaven. The influences of the spirit are heavenly gifts—the renovation of the heart by a divine operation is wisdom from above—the renewed Christian is born from above and become a spiritual man—the state of immortality which Christ has purchased for believers, is an inheritance reserved for them in heaven—in the resurrection they will be clothed with a house from heaven, with spiritual and heavenly bodies, and they will be made to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

The Apostle says, "God has blessed us with ALL spiritual blessings in heavenly things"—with all things necessary to bring us to the enjoyment of himself in heaven. "The divine power," says St. Peter, "hath given us *all things* which pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of him who hath called us to glory and virtue—and hath given us exceeding great and precious promises, that by them we might be partakers of a divine nature."

The particular blessings vouchsafed to, and designed for believers, are enumerated in the following verses; such as election and vocation to be the people of God—predestination to the adoption of children— acceptance in Christ Jesus and redemption through his blood—the revelation of the mystery of God's will—a title to the heavenly inheritance—and the sanctification and sealing of the holy spirit. To display the nature and importance of these blessings we shall have occasion hereafter in the prosecution of our design.

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I would now observe, that the blessings granted to the Ephesian believers, are also tendered to us. God, in his sovereign goodness has chosen us from among the nations of the world to be his peculiar people, and to enjoy his oracles and ordinances. He offers to us the honors and felicities of adoption, and the remission of all our sins through the atonement of his Son. He has proposed for our acceptance an inheritance incorruptible in the heavens. He grants the motions of his blessed spirit to awaken our minds to these important concerns. And to true believers, he affords the sanctifying, sealing and comforting influence of his grace. He has made known to us the mystery of his will, which is still hidden from the greater part of our race. He has favored us with a complete revelation, and placed us in a condition, which allows our frequent attendance on the dispensation of his word and ordinances.

We are in some respects privileged far beyond the Christians to whom this epistle was written. They for a season enjoyed the preaching of an inspired Apostle. In his absence he wrote to them this letter, which doubtless contains the substance of the things which he taught, while he was among them. But of this letter they could have the benefit only by hearing it read in one place and another. While he preached in Asia, he confined his ministry chiefly to this capital city. They who lived in the remoter parts could not, without much labor, enjoy the benefit of his preaching. But we have in our hands not only this epistle, but the other writings of Paul and his fellow Apostles, and we may daily converse with them. Places of divine worship are near us, and, without the expence of distant journeys, we may attend on the preaching of the word and other sacred exercises of religion. We have therefore happier advantages to become acquainted with the doctrines and precepts of the gospel, than the primitive Christians could enjoy. If they were bound

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to give thanks for their privileges; how criminal must be ingratitude under ours!

It is said, While Paul preached in Ephesus, *all they who dwelt in Asia, heard the word of the Lord.* What pains must they have taken! For divers of them came from far. Consider Paul as preaching in the Jewish synagogue at Ephesus, as long as he could have admittance; and, when he was driven from thence, removing to a public school, and there reasoning daily in defence of the gospel. See all the country around coming together, from time to time, to hear this inspired teacher. Observe what pains they took to become acquainted with a religion, which condemned their former sentiments and practices. Remark, how they yielded to the conviction of truth, renounced their idolatry, confessed their evil deeds, condemned their pretended intercourse with invisible spirits, and submitted to the pure and rational religion of the gospel; and then say, whether we have not cause to be deeply humbled, that this same gospel, which we enjoy under superior advantages, has so little influence on our own hearts and the hearts of others? Is there not occasion to lament, that the word of God, which then so mightily grew and prevailed, is now treated with so much indifference?

Ye who neglect to attend on the word now brought near to you, What will you say in excuse for yourselves, when you see how all who dwelt in Asia came to Ephesus to hear this same word?—Ye who can relish nothing, but what accords with your own fancies and humors, and who are at once disgusted with the preaching which contradicts your former sentiments and practices, How will you justify this perverse temper, when you see what humility and candor appeared in those Asiatic heathens?—They could hear Paul disputing daily against their preconceived opinions; could listen with patience to his arguments, which all tended to confound them; and on conviction could give up

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their errors and confess their evil deeds.—Ye who treat the worship and ordinances of God with contempt; what will you plead in your vindication, when you observe, with how much gratitude and reverence the same were received at Ephesus?—Ye who attend on God's word in vain—who feel no influence from it—who, though you hear it, yet live in habitual opposition to it, What will you urge in your defence, when you recollect, how mightily it grew in Ephesus, and how it transformed idolaters, sorcerers, and the grossest transgressors into saints, believers and the worshippers of the true God?

Remember, that you must one day answer before God for all the spiritual blessings which he has sent you. It *is not* a matter of indifference, whether you *receive* or *reject* them. If you put them from you, you *will* suffer the loss of them, and be punished with awful severity for your contempt. When God shall bring every work into judgment, he will take into consideration all the privileges which you have enjoyed, as well as all the works which you have done, and according to both will he judge you. They who have never heard of the gospel, will meet a more tolerable doom, than such as have known and despised it. These will perish wonderfully. Their punishment will be such as they would not believe and could not imagine, though one should declare it to them. The men of Sodom, in their days, were sinners of distinguished guilt, and their destruction, in the conflagration of their city, is set forth as an example of God's righteous severity. But justice has not done with them. In the day of judgment they will receive a still sorer condemnation; and after all, it will be more tolerable for them, than for those who despise the gospel.

To us the word of salvation is sent. Let us hear it with care and receive it with joy, accept the blessings which it offers and walk worthy of him who has called us to his kingdom and glory.

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# SERMON III.

## *Election.*

EPHESIANS i. 4, 5, 6.

*According as he hath chosen us in him, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love, having predestinated us to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ unto himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved :——*

IN the verse preceding the words now read, the Apostle thankfully acknowledges the great mercy of God, *who has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly things in Christ Jesus.*—These blessings he proceeds to enumerate; and the first which he mentions is, God's choosing us to be an holy people to himself, and adopting us to the privileges of children.

The Jews, for many ages, had been the peculiar people of God, separated from other nations, and distinguished by special advantages. God had now seen fit to take the *Gentiles* into covenant with himself, and to abolish the distinction between them and his ancient people.

The Jews believed that God, from the beginning, had chosen *them* to salvation, and had appointed the Messiah in due time to appear in the world, that none of *them* might perish. But the Apostle, to remove from the Jews all cause of boasting, and from the Gentiles all ground of discouragement, here declares, that God

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from the beginning had chosen the *Gentiles* in Christ, and predestinated them to a place in his church, that, in the enjoyment of the gospel, they might become holy and be made meet for heaven.

In our text we may observe the following particulars.

That God had *chosen* and *predestinated* these Ephesians.

That they were chosen to be *holy* and *without blame before him, in love.*

That they were predestinated to *the adoption of children to himself.*

That they were chosen *in Christ Jesus.*

That the reason of God's choosing them was *the good pleasure of his own will.*

That the purpose for which they were chosen was *the praise of the glory of his grace.*

I. We may, first, observe, that God *chose* and *predestinated* these Ephesian Christians *before the foundation of the world.*

Those spiritual privileges and blessings, which they enjoyed or expected, were the result of that glorious plan, which the infinite wisdom and abundant grace of God had formed: *For*, as it is said, verse 11. *they were predestinated according to the purpose of him, who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.*

When we speak of God's *foreknowledge* or *predestination* of events, we must always keep in mind this idea, "that his thoughts are not as our thoughts, but as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his thoughts higher than ours."

This Apostle speaks of Christians, as *predestinated according to God's purpose.* Peter says, *They are elected according to the foreknowledge of God.* But this mode of speaking rather expresses things according to the imperfect manner in which we apprehend them, than according to the perfect manner in which they exist in the divine mind. God's understanding is infi-

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life. He views things immediately and intuitively as they are. Darkness and light, past and future, are alike to him. "He seeth not as man seeth, nor are his years as man's days. But he inhabiteth eternity; and one day is with him as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." Therefore all the phrases, which we meet with in scripture, concerning God's *remembrance* of things past, *foreknowledge* of things to come, and *deliberation* on things present, are to be understood, not as literally expressive of the real operations of his mind, but as figuratively adapted to the weak conceptions of ours. "His knowledge is too wonderful for us; it is high, we cannot attain to it."

We know things past by memory, and our memory we assist by records; so God is often said to *remember* things, and to keep a *book* of remembrance. But we are sensible that these expressions only denote God's perfect knowledge of those things, which *to us* are past —not a laborious recollection of them, or an artificial method of assisting his memory. So, on the other hand, God is said to foreknow things which are future, to foreordain things which shall be done, to write, in the volume of his book, things which his counsel has determined; which phrases do not signify that things are really future and distant to his view—that his mind is reaching forward—that he writes down a plan of operations for his own direction; but they represent the perfect, consummate, unerring wisdom with which he governs the universe.

Viewing the matter in this light, we shall be sensible, that our perplexity concerning God's foreknowledge and decree arises from the imperfection of our minds, and the narrowness of our comprehension; and that there is no more inconsistency between the freedom of moral agents and God's foreknowledge, than there is between *this* and his present knowledge; for with respect to him, foreknowledge and present knowl-

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edge are the same; the difference is only with respect to us, with whom things exist by succession.

The word *election*, or *choosing*, is, in scripture, used in various senses.

Sometimes it signifies the appointment of a person to some eminent office or service. Christ says to his disciples, "I have *chosen* you twelve;" i. e. I have chosen you to be my disciples, and preachers of my gospel. He does not mean that he had chosen them all to *salvation*, for one of them was a *son of perdition*. In this sense Paul was a *chosen vessel* to bear Christ's name among the Gentiles. And Cyrus, Saul, and David are called God's *chosen*, because they were designated to be kings, for the execution of some great purposes of providence.

The word sometimes intends *approbation;* as when Christ says, "Many are called, but few are *chosen;*" i. e. few are *accepted* and *approved*.

Often the word is used in a large sense, to comprehend the whole body of God's professing people, whom he has chosen out of the world to be a peculiar people to himself. The whole nation of the Jews are styled God's *elect*, and his *chosen*. The Christian church, the whole number of professed believers, are called a *chosen generation*, a *peculiar people*.

But this general sense of the word implies a more particular sense. If God has chosen some *nations* rather than others, to enjoy the means of salvation, then he gives some an advantage above others to obtain salvation; and this is as much an act of sovereignty as the election of particular persons. And, without question, some, in the nation, chosen to these privileges, will thereby eventually be made partakers of the salvation revealed. And there are some expressions, in scripture, which seem to import an appointment of persons to *obtain* this salvation, as well as to enjoy the *means* of it. Paul says to the Thessalonians, "God hath chosen you to salvation through sanctification of



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the spirit and belief of the truth, whereunto he hath also called you by our gospel." The Apostle Peter calls Christians, "Elect according to the foreknowledge of God, through sanctification of the spirit." Election, in these passages, cannot be understood merely of an appointment to external privileges, for the subjects of it are said to be chosen *through sanctification* and *faith*. Now they were not brought to the enjoyment of the gospel by their faith and holiness, but they were brought to *these* by the gospel. They were called to spiritual privileges while they were in impenitence and unbelief. The gospel was not the *fruit*, but the *mean* of their faith.

That there is an *election* to *salvation*, Christians are generally agreed: In their manner of explaining it, is the chief difference. Some suppose it to be absolute and without regard to personal qualifications; others suppose it to be conditional, and grounded on a foresight of faith in the persons chosen.

In all questions of this kind there are two great points, which we must keep in view—our dependence on the grace of God; and our moral agency. On the one hand, we must not so conceive of God's election, and the influence of his grace, as to set aside our free agency and final accountableness; nor, on the other hand, must we so explain away God's sovereignty and grace, as to exalt man to a state of independence. While we shun these extremes, we shall not dangerously err in the doctrine before us.

It is manifest from reason, as well as scripture, that God exercises a moral government in the world, and that his providence extends to particular persons, to all circumstances of their condition, and to all the actions of their lives; for we cannot conceive it possible, that he should govern the world in general, and yet overlook particular persons; or that he should order their circumstances, and yet have no superintendancy or control of their actions.

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It it also certain, that the grace of God operates in the conversion of sinners, in such a manner and degree, that they are saved by him, not of themselves.

Now so far as the grace of God, in the salvation of sinners, is absolute and unconditional, election or predestination is so, and no farther. They run parallel to each other. We are to conceive of election, in the same manner as we conceive of the influence of grace; for election can be nothing more, than God's foreknowing and predetermining (to speak according to our way of conception) that he will exercise his grace in such a manner, as shall prove effectual. And his counsels and decrees are only the plan of his providential government. If the latter is not inconsistent with human liberty, *the former* cannot be so. If the thing *done does not* control our agency, the previous purpose cannot control it.

The question, whether election is conditional, will easily be solved by considering the end which it respects.

If we consider it as respecting the *original plan* of salvation, it must be absolute and unconditional. It could not be owing to any foreseen worthiness in fallen creatures, that God chose and determined to send them a Saviour, and to propose such a particular method of salvation; but merely to his selfmoving, sovereign grace. Their guilt and impotence were the reasons why such a method of salvation was necessary, and therefore their foreseen holiness and worthiness could not be the reasons why such a method was adopted.

If we consider election as respecting the *means* of salvation, it is unconditional. It was not owing to the virtue and goodness of the human race, that a revelation was given them. It was not owing to the previous desires, prayers and endeavors of the Ephesians or other Gentile nations, that they were brought unto a church state, and to the knowledge of the way of sal-

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vation. It is not owing to any thing which we had done, that the gospel is sent to us, and that we were born and have been educated under it. All this must be ascribed to the pure favor of God. He chose the Ephesians, not because they were holy, but that they might be holy. He predestinated them, and made known to them the mystery of his will, according to the good pleasure which he purposed in himself. In this sense the Apostle applies the words of the prophet, "I am found of them who sought me not; I am made manifest to them who inquired not after me."

Farther: If we consider election as it respects the *first awakening influence* of the Spirit of God on the hearts of obstinate sinners, whereby they are excited to seek the mercy of God with earnestness, and to attend on the means of salvation with diligence, it is here also sovereign and unconditional. For that sinners, dead in their trespasses, should be awakened to consideration, inquiry, and an attendance on the means of life, must be owing, not to their own previous good dispositions, but to some special Providence, seasonable word, or internal influence, which was not of their seeking. Accordingly our Saviour says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock: If any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him and sup with him, and he with me." His knocking is from his own motion, not from the invitation of sinners; *That is* the occasion of their opening; not *this* the occasion of his knocking.

Again: If election be considered as it respects the grace of God in the *conversion* of sinners, I think, it may be called sovereign and unconditional. To prevent mistakes, I would qualify this observation.

The gospel comes to men accompanied with the Spirit, which is given to convince them of sin, awaken in them an apprehension of danger and excite their attention to the means of safety. Such exercises ordinarily precede conversion. And as sinners more

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readily yield to these motions of the Spirit, and more diligently apply the means of religion, they have more reason to expect the grace which will prove effectual, "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given." In this sense I admit, that converting grace may be called conditional. But where shall we find those who have never resisted the Spirit of grace, or neglected the means of salvation?——To sinners under this guilt and forfeiture, God can be under no obligation, by justice or promise, to grant the presence of his renewing, or the return of his awakening grace, or even the prolongation of life. If the continuance of life, and the repeated excitations of the Spirit, are sovereign and unpromised mercies, converting grace is no less so. *Saving* benefits are *never* promised to sinners on any conditions, but those which imply a change of character.

Now if among those who have alike abused and forfeited the grace of God, some are reclaimed, and others left in a state of sin, I can see no violation of justice or of promise; for none, on either of these grounds, had a claim to the benefit. The former must adore God's mercy; the latter condemn their own perverseness. The mercy granted to those is no prejudice to these. Election then, in relation to converting grace, is, in this sense, absolute, that it is the result of God's good pleasure, and not the effect of any condition actually performed by the sinner, in virtue of which he could claim it.

But then, if we consider election, as it respects the final *bestowment* of salvation, it is plainly conditional. *This* God gives, and this he *determines* to give only to such as are made meet for it. To imagine, that he chooses some to eternal life without regard to their faith and holiness, is to suppose that some are saved without these qualifications, or saved contrary to his purpose. It is the express declaration of scripture, "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.—God hath chosen us to salvation through sanctification of

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the spirit and belief of the truth." The terms of salvation are in the gospel clearly stated; and we must not imagine, that, contrary to this statement, there is a secret purpose, which will open the door of salvation to the finally impenitent, against whom the gospel has shut it, or will shut the door against the sincerely penitent, to whom the gospel has opened it.

Whatever difficulties may attend this doctrine, so much is plain; They who are chosen to salvation, are chosen to be holy. And whatever doubts we may have concerning our own election, we may make it sure, by adding to our faith the virtues and works of the gospel. "If we do these things we shall never fall."

We proceed,

II. To consider the *spiritual qualifications*, to which the Ephesians were chosen. "God chose them to be holy and without blame before him in love."

There is a *relative* or *ceremonial* holiness often applied to persons and things, on account of their separation from a common to a sacred use. But more usually the term denotes a *real, internal* purity, in opposition to moral pollution or *sin*. This is the sense of it in the text: To be *holy* is to be "*without blame* in the sight of God."

Holiness consists in the conformity of the soul to the divine nature and will; and is opposed to all moral evil. In fallen creatures it begins in the renovation of the mind after the image of God. Hence Christians are said "to be renewed in the spirit of their minds, and to be made new creatures." In this change the heart is formed to the love of God's character and will, and to a hatred of whatever appears contrary to them. "They who love the Lord, hate evil." This renovation, though imperfect in degree, yet extends to the whole man, so that "all things become new." And though the renewed Christian in many things offends, yet he has respect to all God's commands. He desires

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to be *without blame before God.* He contents not himself with his present imperfect measure of goodness, but is solicitous to cleanse himself from all filthiness, and to perfect holiness in the fear of God. With this view he attends on all divine institutions. He desires the pure milk of God's word that he may grow thereby. He receives with meekness the engrafted word, hoping that it may save his soul. He is not disgusted at a reproof or warning, because it comes home to his case; he regards it as a word in season, is thankful for it, and humbly applies it. When he hears the word, it is not that he may find matter for objection and cavil, or that he may apply what he hears to others, but that he may know himself more *intimately*, understand his duty more *perfectly*, and do God's will more acceptably.

When he comes to the ordinance of the supper, he desires there to remember and show forth the death of his Saviour. He does not expect to be accepted, merely because he eats and drinks in Christ's presence; he considers that he must also depart from iniquity. He is not aiming at a name to live, but at real improvement in the spiritual life. He attends to the great things exhibited in this ordinance, such as the evil and danger of sin, the ruined condition of the human race, the mercy of God in providing for them a Saviour, and the love of Christ in giving himself a sacrifice to God for the sins of men. By the contemplation of these things he strengthens his purpose of obedience, his faith in the Redeemer, his gratitude to God, and his love to all men.

We may observe farther, that the Apostle considers *love* as a main branch of holiness. "God hath chosen us to be holy and without blame before him *in love.*"

When the word *love*, in the sacred writings, is used indefinitely, and without limitation to a particular object, love to men, and especially to the brethren, is usually intended. So the word is to be understood

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here, as appears from the 15th verse of this chapter, and from the parallel place in the epistle to the Colossians, where the Apostle gives thanks for their faith in Christ and love to the *saints*.

Love is, every where in scripture, considered as a most essential part of the character of the saint. Charity out of a pure heart is the end of the commandment. Christians are above all things to put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness. Believers have purified their souls in obeying the truth unto unfeigned love of the brethren. Brotherly kindness and charity are the graces, which complete the Christian character.

Let us remember then, that without charity all our pretentions to gospel holiness are vain. We may talk with the tongue of men and angels; we may discover a fervent zeal in matters which bear some relation to religion; we may have much knowledge of the mysteries of revelation; we may profess a strong faith; we may be liberal of our substance in promoting some favorite designs, which we call *pious* ones; but if we have no charity, all is nothing—or nothing but glare and noise. That charity which belongs to the Christian temper, is kind and longsuffering, opposite to pride, ostentation and envy. It is humble and peaceable, meek and condescending—not easily provoked, not apt to censure. It rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth. It beareth, hopeth and believeth all things.

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# SERMON IV.

## *Adoption.*

EPHESIANS i. 4, 5, 6.

*According as he hath chosen us in him, before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love, having predestinated us to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, to the praise, of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.*

THE nature of that *election* or *predestination*, of which these Ephesians were the subjects; and that *holiness* and *love*, to which they were chosen, we illustrated in our preceding discourse. We are now,

III. To consider the *adoption* to which believers are predestinated.

*Adoption* is a word several times used by this Apostle, to express the high privileges and exalted hopes of Christians in this world, and the superior dignity and happiness reserved for them in another. The word used by him, which we render adoption, properly signifies *putting one in the place of a son.*

The word suggests to us this idea, that we have no *natural* right to the privileges of children; for though we are by our creation the children of God, yet we are become disobedient and rebellious children, and as such are excluded from all title to the inheritance orig-



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inally promised to obedience. Our *sonship* is not our native right, but the effect of God's gracious adoption.

In this adoption are included several important privileges.

1. It implies a state of *freedom*, in opposition to *bondage*. The Apostle says, *We have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear, but the spirit of adoption.*

Believers are free, as being *delivered from the bondage of sin.*

This freedom they obtain in the renovation of their minds after the image of God. "As many as receive Christ, to them is given power to become the children of God, for they are born of him."—They are his children by a heavenly and spiritual birth. They are born from above—born of the Spirit; "and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." They are no more the servants of sin to obey it in the lusts thereof; but, being made free from sin, they are become the servants of God, and they have their fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.

They are free, as having *near access to God and intimate communion with him.*

"Through Christ they have access by the Spirit unto the Father. Because they are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into their hearts, and given them the spirit of adoption, whereby they cry, Abba, Father."

Children are usually admitted to that familiar intercourse, which is denied to servants: So they, whom God has called to the adoption of children, may come boldly to his throne. They know where to find him, and may approach even to his seat. They have liberty to enter into the most holy place by the blood of Christ. And God makes to them some peculiar communications of his grace, to help their infirmities, strengthen their good resolutions, comfort them in afflictions, defend them against temptations, and lead

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them in the way everlasting. "The secret of the Lord is with them who fear him, and he will shew them his covenant. The meek he will guide in judgment, and teach them his way." Christ says to his disciples, "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I have commanded you. I call you not servants, for a servant knoweth not what his Lord doth; but I have called you friends, for all things, which I have heard of my Father, I have made known unto you."

2. Adoption brings us under *the peculiar care of God's providence.*

"God is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works." The just and the unjust partake of his common bounties. But he is especially good to them who are of a clean heart. "His eyes are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry. No good thing will be withheld from them who walk uprightly. Christ is made head over all things for the church."

Good and bad are subject to the common adversities of life; but the afflictions, which befal the just, are ordered in a more immediate subservience to their spiritual interest. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth; he scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. If we endure chastening, God dealeth with us as with sons; for what son is he, whom the father chasteneth not? And God chasteneth us for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness. And though no affliction for the present, is joyous, but grievous, yet afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruits of righteousness."

Needful and seasonable correction is one of the benefits of adoption—one of the privileges of God's children. The gracious intention of it is to recover them from their backslidings—to wean them from the world—to quicken them in their duty—to prove their sincerity—and prepare them for heaven. David considered his adversity as a fruit of God's parental faith-

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fulness and love. "I know, O God, that thy judgments are right, and thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me."

Affliction, considered in itself, is grievous—considered as the effect of sin, is humbling—but, considered as the allotment of divine wisdom for our eternal advantage, it is matter of thankfulness and joy. "Count it all joy," says St. James, "when ye fall into divers temptations, for the trying of your faith worketh patience." "Rejoice," says St. Peter, "inasmuch as ye are partakers of the sufferings of Christ, that when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." The children of God must esteem it a mighty privilege, that they are under the care of a wise and gracious parent, who will always treat them according to their wants; will give them prosperity as far as it is safe, and withdraw it when it would be dangerous; will send correction when it is needed, and remove it when the occasion ceases; and, in a word, will cause all things to work for their good.

3. Adoption includes a title to *a glorious resurrection from the dead*, and to *an eternal inheritance in the heavens*.

So this Apostle explains it in the eighth chapter of the Romans. "We have received the spirit of adoption—and the spirit itself beareth witness with our spirits, that we are the children of God; and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ. If we suffer with him, we shall also be glorified with him; and all the sufferings of the present time, are not worthy to be compared with the glory, which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God; for the creature shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the sons of God. And we, who have the first fruits of the spirit, groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, even the redemption of the body." To the same pur-

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pose are the words of St. John, 1 Epistle, Chapter iii. "Behold now, what manner of love the father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God? Now we are the sons of God; and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that when Christ shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is." So also says St. Peter, 1 Epistle i. 3. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath begotton us to a lively hope by the resurrection of Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, fading not away, reserved in heaven for us."

Now if believers are the children of God, then their temper must be a child like temper—a temper corresponding to their relation, condition and character. Let us therefore, as becomes obedient children, be holy in all manner of conversation, for he who has called us is holy. Let us be followers of God as dear children, walking worthy of him, who has called us to his kingdom and glory. Let us reverence and love our Supreme Parent, trust ourselves in the hands of his goodness, patiently bear the corrections of his love, humbly submit to the disposals of his wisdom, maintain a daily correspondence with him, attend to all the discoveries of his will, and in all things cheerfully comply with his commands, however contrary to our natural wishes. In imitation of his goodness let us do good as we have opportunity; and, regarding his professed children as our brethren, let us walk in love to them, endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace; for he, who is the God and Father of all, is above all, through all, and in us all.

I proceed to our

IV. Observation: That all spiritual blessings are derived to us *through Jesus Christ.* "God hath *chosen us in Christ*—predestinated us *to the adoption of children by Christ—made us accepted in the Beloved.*"

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It is the grand theme of the gospel, that "God is in Christ reconciling the world to himself."

The wisdom of God saw fit to exercise mercy to sinful men through the mediation of his Son, who came into our world, assumed our nature, and suffered death on the cross for our sins. What were all the reasons, which, in the divine government, made such a scheme of redemption necessary, it may be difficult for us to determine, and it is needless to inquire. We may, however, easily discern some important ends, which it answers. It clearly displays the holiness, justice and mercy of God, the evil and demerit of sin, the punishment which it deserves, the grace of God to pardon it, and the amazing danger of continued impenitence in it: We must therefore suppose, that these were among the reasons why it was adopted.

As Christ is the Mediator, so all the blessings, which we enjoy and hope for, are represented as coming to us through him. We are *justified* through his blood—*adopted* in him—obtain the *promise* of the *Spirit* and are *sanctified* in him—are admitted to the *means of salvation*, called to the *privileges of the gospel*, and made partakers of *eternal life* through him.

The Apostle says, *God has chosen us in Christ, before the foundation of the world.* It was the eternal plan of divine wisdom to save sinners through Jesus Christ, who, in the purpose of God, was a lamb slain from the foundation of the world. Their salvation therefore cannot originate from any worthiness in themselves, but must depend on the interposition of the Saviour; for every thing which God has done, and which, even before the foundation of the world, he purposed to do for the recovery of sinners, was in consideration of that all perfect sacrifice which has been offered on the cross.

Now if all spiritual benefits come to us only through Christ, it is an obvious conclusion, that we must seek and expect them in his name: For we must evidently

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apply for them in the way in which God bestows them. Faith in Christ, therefore, becomes a necessary condition of acceptance with God. However God may see fit to deal with some, who enjoy not our light, yet to us, who have known the mystery of his will, faith in Christ is a necessary principle of religion. "For as much as we know, that we are not redeemed with corruptible things, but with the precious blood of Christ, who was ordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifested in these last times for us, we must come to God by him, and by him believe in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, that our faith and hope might be in God."

V. The Apostle farther teaches us, that the reason of God's choosing believers in Christ, and predestinating them to adoption, is *the good pleasure of his will.*

If we admit that we are sinful, fallen creatures, unworthy of God's favor, and insufficient for our own redemption, which is a plain doctrine of the gospel, and an evident dictate of experience, then our salvation must ultimately be resolved into God's good pleasure. There is no other source from which it can be derived. If death is our desert, our deliverance must be by grace.

Final salvation is suspended on the condition of our repentance, faith and holiness; but it is not the less grace; for these previous requisites are not merely of ourselves; they are the gifts of God. The original plan of salvation is from him, not from us: The gospel itself is a divine gift, not a human discovery: Our being under circumstances to enjoy it is not the effect of our previous choice, but of God's sovereign goodness: It is the good Spirit of God, who awakens the attention of sinners to the gospel, excites them to the use of the means in their hands, and makes these means successful. The gospel considers and treats us as free, but not as independent agents. In common life, the success of our labors, as well as our ability to labor,

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depends on the support and concurrence of Providence. In the spiritual life, we are no less dependent on the influence of grace. As our encouragement to worldly industry arises from a belief, that God's Providence always attends us, so our animation in the Christian life springs from a persuasion, that God's grace is sufficient for us. "The just shall live by faith."

Salvation is the purchase of Christ; but still it no less originates from God's good pleasure; "for in this was manifested the love of God toward us, because he sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him." "God, who is rich in mercy," says our Apostle, "for the great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, that in the ages to come, he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness to us by Jesus Christ. For by grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any may should boast; for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to good works, which God hath ordained, that we should walk in them."

This brings us to our last observation,

VI. That the great purpose for which God has chosen and called us, is *the praise of the glory of his grace.*

God's grace is here represented as eminently glorious. Goodness is the glory of the divine character; grace is the glory of the divine goodness; the plan of salvation for sinners by Jesus Christ, is the glory of divine grace. Here grace is exercised toward the most unworthy creatures, in the bestowment of the greatest of all benefits, by a method the most wonderful and expensive, even the death of a divine Saviour. The salvation of the smallest sinner is abundant grace; but where sin has abounded, grace much more abounds.

God has made this display of his grace, that unworthy creatures might apply to him for salvation. His calls, invitations and commands are to all, without dis-

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duction of character. "The righteousness of God, through the faith of Jesus Christ, is unto all, and upon all them who believe, and there is no difference." And lest sinners, conscious of aggravated guilt, should fear an exclusion from salvation, particular assurance is given, that Christ came to save the chief of sinners; and such are distinctly invited to come and receive the benefit of God's abundant grace.

The heralds of the gospel were sent forth to proclaim among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, not only that men might know, what was the hope of their calling, and what the glory of the heavenly inheritance, but also that principalities and powers in heavenly places might learn more of the manifold wisdom of God.

We are to praise the glory of God's grace by a cheerful compliance with the precepts, and thankful acceptance of the blessings of the gospel. If, when God offers us his salvation, we will not receive it—if, when he holds out his pardon, we will continue in our sins—if, when Jesus has once died to expiate our guilt, we will open his bleeding wounds by our impenitence and unbelief—if, when the Spirit of grace strives for our recovery, we will resist it—and when patience waits, we will harden our hearts; we treat the God of heaven with such ingratitude—we trample on his grace with such contempt, that the heavens must be astonished. If he who wilfully transgresses God's law deserves death without mercy, of how much sorer punishment will they be judged worthy, who thus despise and abuse his grace!

We are to praise God's glorious grace by a holy life. We then honor it best, when under the influence of it we have our conversation as becomes the gospel. "The love of Christ constrains us," says the Apostle, "because we thus judge, that if Christ died for us, we who live should not henceforth live to ourselves, but to him who died for us and rose again; therefore, if any



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man be in Christ, he is a new creature." He rejects with abhorrence the idea, that we should continue in sin, when grace abounds; for, says he, "How shall we, who are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"

Christians are "a chosen generation, a peculiar people, that they should shew forth the praises of him, who hath called them out of darkness into his marvellous light." Since they have obtained such mercy, let them abstain from fleshly lusts, and have their conversation in all his good works.

We are to glorify God's grace by encouraging others to accept it. "God hath quickened us in Christ," says the Apostle, "that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness to us by Jesus Christ." Of himself he says, "I obtained mercy, that in me Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering for a pattern to them, who should afterward believe in him to life everlasting." St. Peter exhorts those who had been called into God's marvellous light, "Have your conversation honest among the Gentiles, that by your good works, which they behold, they may glorify God in the day of visitation." If, while we profess to be partakers of God's grace, we by the impurity of our lives strengthen bold transgressors, and lay stumbling blocks in the way of little ones, we dishonor and reproach that grace which we ought to exalt.

Believers will in a more perfect manner shew forth the praise of God's glorious grace in the future world. Grace will there be all the burthen of their song; and *this* they will sing in the highest strains. They will tune their harps to sound the wonders of Creation and Providence: But when the glory of divine grace in the salvation of sinners, especially in their own salvation, becomes the theme, then they will touch the most sonorous strings. When they strike on this new song, "Thou art worthy for thou hast redeemed us by thy blood, and made us kings and priests unto thee," not

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only saints, but angels all around will catch the sound, and every creature in heaven, and those redeemed from the earth, will feel the theme, and join their voices, saying, "Worthy is the lamb, that was slain to receive power, and riches, and glory, and blessing; and be these ascribed to him who sitteth on the throne, and to the lamb for ever and ever."

What now remains, my brethren, but that we all joyfully accept the overtures of divine grace? Are you convinced of your guilty helpless condition? Here in Christ Jesus is grace to help, and mercy to pardon you. Say not in your hearts, "We are by the purpose of God excluded from salvation."—God's purpose is not contrary to his word; his election contradicts not his grace. You are already chosen to the enjoyment of the gospel: You have already been made partakers of some awakening influences of the spirit: You have been called by the invitations of God. His word excludes you not, and you have no right to exclude yourselves. Remember, that they who are chosen to salvation, are chosen to be holy. In a way of faith and penitence salvation is offered; in this way make your election sure. Comply with God's calls—his word will never fail. Remember your dependence on his grace, seek it humbly, accept it thankfully, receive it not in vain, walk worthy of him who has called you to his kingdom and glory.

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# SERMON V.

## *Redemption.*

EPHESIANS i. 7, 8.

*In whom we have redemption through his blood the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace; wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence.*

THE Apostle, in the third verse of the context, celebrates the grace of God in the spiritual blessings bestowed on our fallen race; and then proceeds to enumerate these blessings. He hath chosen us to be holy—predestinated us to the adoption of children—made us accepted in the beloved—granted us redemption through Christ's blood—revealed to us the mystery of his will—gathered both Jews and Gentiles together in one body—and sealed us with the holy spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance."

The blessing mentioned in the text, is our *redemption.*

For the illustration of this privilege we may consider—Who are the *subjects* of it?—What is the *nature* of it?—The *way* in which it is procured—The *fountain* from which it originates—And the *wisdom* displayed in it.

I. We are to consider, Who are the *subjects* of this redemption?

The Apostle says, "WE have redemption;" that is, "*We* who were chosen in Christ to be *holy*—we

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who have *believed* and *trusted* in Christ, have redemption."

The redemption purchased by Christ, though offered without distinction to all who hear the gospel, is actually *bestowed* only on those, who repent of their sins and believe in the Saviour. "The redeemer comes to those who turn from ungodliness." It is sin which has brought us under condemnation—It is by repentance of sin that we obtain redemption. The benefits of the gospel are free, but not indiscriminate. They are designed for as many as will receive them on the terms proposed; but not for all promiscuously, whether they comply with the terms or not.

The idea which some fondly entertain, that redemption is absolutely universal, and in fact comprehends all men, is without scriptural foundation. There are indeed some expressions which import universality. Christ is said "to have given himself a ransom for *all*, and to be made a propitiation for the sins of the *whole world*." But such expressions must always be understood in a sense consistent with the terms stated in the gospel. The *price* paid for our redemption is *sufficient* for all. It is designed for the benefit of sinners in all *nations* and *ages*. It is not, like the legal expiations, of limited efficacy and temporary use. The *offer* of salvation is made to sinners of all *characters*, and all who *believe* will be made partakers of it. "The righteousness of God through the faith of Christ, is unto all them who believe, and there is no difference." In these respects Christ died for *all*, and gave himself a ransom for *all*. But the benefits of redemption will be actually bestowed only on those who are penitent, faithful and holy—not on all indiscriminately, whether penitent or impenitent; whether believing or unbelieving. The gospel expressly assures us, that without repentance, faith, and holiness, there is no salvation—that Christ came to save us from our sins, to deliver us from this evil world, and to redeem us from our vain con-

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versation—that he bore our sins on the cross, that we, being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness. If, expecting to be justified by Christ, we are still found sinners, and emboldened to continue such, we treat, as the minister of sin, that Saviour who came to call us to repentance, and to purify to himself a people zealous of good works.

II. We are to consider the *nature* of this redemption.

There is a twofold redemption mentioned in the writings of this Apostle; the redemption of the soul from the guilt of sin by pardon, and the redemption of the body from the power of the grave by the resurrection. It is the former of these, which is intended in the text; for so it is explained: *We have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.* The latter is intended verse 14, where the Apostle speaks of the Spirit, as "the earnest of our inheritance, until *the redemption of the purchased possession*;" and Romans 8th chapter, where the creature is said to "wait for the adoption even *the redemption of the body.*" But these two privileges are connected. The remission of sin, which is the release from our obligation to punishment, is accompanied with a title to eternal life. "Whom God justifies, them he also glorifies."

The divine law condemns those, who continue not in all things written therein to do them. As we have all sinned, so, considered in relation to the law only, we are all under condemnation. Forgiveness frees us from this condemnation, and places us in a state of favor with God. It is expressed in scripture by a variety of phrases; such as the *blotting out* of our iniquities —the *forgiveness* of our *debts*— making us *accepted*— admitting us to *peace with God*—*justifying* us from our sins, and unto life—imputing *righteousness*, and *not* imputing *sin*.—These phrases all import the same thing: Our deliverance from that state of guilt, in which we stood exposed to suffer the demerit of our

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sins; and our gracious acceptance to a state of peace with God, as if we had not offended.

The terms of this forgiveness are called repentance, faith, regeneration and conversion, or turning to God; all which express the same thing in different points of view, even a change of soul from the habitual love of sin to the love and service of God. Whenever the sinner, convinced of his sins, renounces them with godly sorrow and in hearty purpose, committing himself to the mercy of God in Christ with resolutions of future obedience, he is discharged from guilt, and entitled to eternal life. Where this change is real, there will be fruits meet for repentance. From these fruits arises a comfortable evidence of the sincerity of the heart, and a good hope of the heavenly inheritance.

*III.* The next thing here observable is, the *way* and *manner*, in which believers become partakers of this privilege. *Through the blood of Christ.*

The Apostles, and especially St. Paul, in their preaching and writings, dwell much on the death of Christ, as the ground of our hope. Christ crucified was their favorite theme.

The infinite mercy of God inclines him to forgive sinners; but his wisdom saw fit to grant them forgiveness in such a way as should clearly display his righteousness, as well as his mercy. The punishment of our iniquities he therefore laid on his own Son, who voluntarily gave himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour.

The Apostle takes notice, that Jesus Christ, through whose blood we obtain forgiveness, is *the Beloved.* On this circumstance greatly depends the value of his sacrifice. "He hath made us accepted in *the beloved*, in whom we have redemption through his blood.—God hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin.—He hath not spared his own Son, but delivered him up for us—Christ was manifested to bear our sins, and in him

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was to sin—God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

This character of Christ shews the excellence of his sacrifice. "He through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God. Such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who needed not, as the ancient priests, to offer sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's; for this he did once, when he offered up himself." Our redemption is ascribed to the sufferings of Christ, especially to his last sufferings—to his blood—to his death on the cross. But his obedience, his holy life was necessary to our redemption, as without it there could have been no atoning virtue in his death.

The character of Christ, as *the beloved*, displays the grace of God in giving him for us. From hence the Apostle infers the greatness of God's compassion for a guilty world, and his readiness to grant all blessings to believers. "He who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, How shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

IV. We may observe the *fountain* from which our redemption flows; *the riches of God's grace*.

Sin deserves punishment, and the remission of deserved punishment is mere grace. Pardon merited, is a contradiction. Every blessing bestowed on sinners is by grace: But the blessing of forgiveness is according to the *riches*, the *exceeding*, the *unsearchable* riches of grace.

If it be grace in Almighty God to bestow on sinners the smallest favor, what abundant grace must it be to forgive *all* our *innumerable* transgressions—to forgive them *wholly* and *finally*—not only to exempt us from punishment, but make us *accepted*, as if we had not offended—to own us as his *children*—to admit us to communion with himself—to grant us the constant presence of his good Spirit—and vouchsafe to us eternal

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life! The richness and variety of the blessings shew that they flow from a full and liberal fountain.

God's grace appears richer still, when we consider our own *unworthiness*. We are not worthy of the least of all the mercies, which God has shewed us; much less of *this* the *greatest* of all. A sense of guilt filled the Apostle with admiring thoughts of God's grace in his salvation. "I was the chief of sinners; but I obtained mercy—and the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant."

The grace of God is still more wonderful in the way and manner of its dispensation. "We have redemption *through Christ's blood*, according to the riches of God's grace.—He has commended his love toward us, in that *while we were* sinners Christ died for us."

V. Our text teaches us, that in this dispensation of mercy, *God has abounded to us in all wisdom and prudence*.

"Manifold are God's works; in wisdom he has made them all." But the most glorious display of his wisdom is in the work of our redemption.

Here the perfections of God appear in the brightest lustre and most beautiful harmony.

He has manifested the exceeding riches of his mercy in giving his own Son to redeem a guilty race—his infinite purity, and immutable justice, in requiring such a grand and awful sacrifice in order to the remission of human guilt—the perfect rectitude of his law in forgiving our transgressions only through the obedience and sufferings of his Son—his inviolable faithfulness and truth in executing the threatening of death on him who consented to bear our iniquities. Here we see the mercy, justice, holiness and truth of God, all united and operating in concert; so that, as the Psalmist says, "mercy and truth are met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Truth springs from the earth—and righteousness looks down from heaven; The Lord gives grace and glory; his salvation is nigh



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to them that fear him, and glory dwells on the earth. He speaks peace to his people in such a manner, that they may not turn again to folly."

In this dispensation there is a door of hope opened to the most unworthy.

A sinner, under deep conviction of his guilt, is apt to fear, that there can be no forgiveness for him. When Peter represented to the Jews their horrible wickedness in crucifying the Lord of glory, the Redeemer of sinners, they were pricked in the heart and said, "*What shall WE do?* You teach us, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord, shall be saved. But do *we* come within this general encouragement? We have with wicked hands crucified and slain this Saviour. Is there any pardon for *us?*" Yes; says the Apostle, "the promise is to you; it is to all: Repent therefore for the remission of sins." In such a case as this, sinners need some other ground of hope, than a general declaration that God is good. For though they are persuaded of God's goodness, they cannot from thence certainly conclude that sin may be forgiven—much less that all sins, such sins as they have committed, will be forgiven, and the offenders received to favor. To penitent souls such grace might appear incredible. To remove from them all fears and suspicions, God has displayed the riches of his grace in giving his Son to be a propitiation for sin. God's mercy to pardon is matter of faith; but the death of Christ is matter of fact, of which there is sensible evidence. On this our faith rests;—convinced of this, we can easily believe, that God's mercy will forgive the penitent.

In this dispensation believers have the greatest possible security. Their salvation is in the hands of a divine Saviour—not in their own hands. If it depended on themselves wholly, it must at best be very precarious. Innocent Adam, and many of the Angels, lost their first state. And surely the fallen sons of Adam cannot recover themselves. And if they were once re-

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covered and pardoned, yet without a better security than their own strength and obedience, they still must perish; for one transgression would again involve them in guilt and ruin.

But their salvation is lodged in better hands than their own—in the hands of one who is mighty to save, and who will keep what is committed to him. They are justified by a righteousness which is perfect—by the righteousness of the Son of God—To him they are united by faith—From him they derive grace to help in time of need—By his grace they are strong; they are able to do all things—They are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.

This dispensation holds forth the most awful terrors against sin, and the most powerful motives to obedience.

When we see the holiness and justice of God displayed in the sufferings of Christ for the sins of men, it is a just and natural reflection, "If these things were done in a green tree, what will be done in the dry?"—If the Saviour, substituted in our place, endured such anguish, What are they to expect who, rejecting his atonement, are doomed to suffer the demerit of their own sins?—If God spared not his own Son, when our iniquities were laid upon him, surely on the unbelieving and impenitent he will cast the fury of his wrath, and will not spare.

But, on the other hand, What glorious hopes are set before those, who by repentance flee from the wrath to come! God, who has done so much for the salvation of a guilty race, will assuredly accept those who submit to him; will assist their endeavors to serve him, and will reward their humble obedience. And how glorious must be that reward, which is purchased for believers, not by works of righteousness which they have done, but by the all perfect obedience and most precious blood of a divine Redeemer. "The gift by grace, which is through Jesus Christ, will abound to

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the faithful—They will receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness; and grace will reign through righteousness unto eternal life." Justly then might the Apostle say, "God has abounded to us in all wisdom and prudence."

Our subject ought to awaken the guilty and impenitent, and urge their speedy escape from the evil which threatens them. Great is the demerit of sin, or so costly a sacrifice for its expiation would not have been required. But let sinners remember, that their guilt, great as it is, will be greatly aggravated by their contempt of the blood of Christ, and their abuse of the riches of divine grace. If he who despises the law of God deserves death without mercy; how sore will be the punishment of those, who tread under foot the Son of God, resist the grace of the holy spirit, and profane the blood of the covenant!

What a happy security believers enjoy! They are made accepted in the beloved. And if they are accepted in him, they are doubtless safe.—There is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus. Nothing shall be able to separate them from the love of God, which is in him.—Their life is hidden with Christ in God; and when Christ shall appear, they will appear with him in glory.

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# SERMON VI.

## *The Gospel designed to gather all things into One.*

EPHESIANS, i. 9, 10, 11, 12.

*Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he hath purposed in himself, that, in the dispensation of the fulness of times, he might gather together in one, all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are in earth; even in him, in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him, who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will, that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.*

REDEMPTION from the present guilt and the future punishment of sin, is a blessing which comes to sinners from the grace of God through our Lord Jesus Christ. This blessing is granted, not indiscriminately to all, but peculiarly to those who believe and trust in Jesus Christ, and who repent and become holy before God. These qualifications are the gifts of God, but gifts usually bestowed in a way of means. That divine operation, which disposes the hearts of sinners to repentance and faith, is offered to them in their attendance on the instructions of the gospel. The grace of God, however, in bringing sinners to repentance of sin and faith in the Saviour, is no less to be acknowledged, than if all means were utterly excluded; for the gospel itself is as much a divine gift, as the influence of the Spirit. All things are of God, who hath recon-

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eiled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath instituted for our benefit the ministry of reconciliation.

In the enumeration of the spiritual blessings granted us through Jesus Christ, the Apostle mentions, in our text, the mystery of the gospel, as one which deserves our most thankful regard.

In the words now before us, there are three things observable:

I. The sovereign grace of God in making known to us the mystery of his will.

II. The purpose of God in this dispensation; *that he might gather together in one, all things in Christ.*

III. The obligation, which lies on such as enjoy this privilege, *to live to the praise and glory of God's grace.*

I. We are taught the sovereign grace of God in giving us the gospel. *He hath made known to us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in himself.*

Let it here be particularly remarked,

1. The gospel is called *the mystery of God's will;* and, Chapter iii, *the mystery which from the beginning was hid in God;* and *the unsearchable riches of Christ.*

You will not imagine, that the Apostle by these phrases intends to represent the gospel as obscure and unintelligible; for he elsewhere says, that he and the other apostles "used great plainness of speech, and, by manifestation of the truth, commended themselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." But his meaning is, that the gospel scheme was undiscoverable by the efforts and researches of human reason, and could be made known to men only by the light of divine revelation. He says, "God has *made known* to us the mystery of his will." He calls the gospel a *revelation* of the mystery, which had been hidden from preceding ages. It is a mystery in regard to those ages, in which it was kept secret; but not in regard

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to the ages, in which it is *revealed*, so that all men may *see* and *understand* it. This is the usual sense of the word.

And it is not the *whole* gospel that is in this sense called a mystery; but only some particular doctrines of it. There are many things in it, such as the being and providence of God, and the great and leading duties of morality, which even the Heathens themselves acknowledged. But the method of our redemption by Jesus Christ is a mystery, which never could have been known, if God had not revealed it. The Apostle says, "We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory, which none of the princes of this world knew; but God *hath* revealed it to us by his spirit, *that we might* know the things which are freely given us of God, which things we also speak." The mystery of the gospel was first revealed by the spirit to the prophets; then more fully to the Apostles; and by them preached with great plainness to the world. Their preaching was a *revelation* of the *mystery* of God's will concerning the way of salvation through Jesus Christ.

There are, indeed, many things in the gospel, which are, and will remain incomprehensible to human reason; but, though we cannot fully *comprehend* them, we may sufficiently *understand* them. The promises of God, the terms of happiness, and the duties required of us, are clearly stated. What salvation is, how it was procured, in what way it is conveyed, and where to look for help in all our weaknesses and wants, we are plainly insructed. No farther revelation do we need to teach us the acceptable will of God, and lead us along toward heaven. The one which we have is perfect. They who pretend to add to it, bring on themselves the curses written in it.

How absurd, how impious is it then, to represent the gospel as a mystery, which cannot be understood

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without a new revelation immediately from God! If the gospel is a *revelation* of the mystery, we are not to expect a revelation of this revelation, as if it were a mystery still. The Apostle says, "If we, or an angel from heaven, preach another gospel, let him be accursed." The Apostles had the divine mystery communicated to them by the Spirit; their divine inspiration they proved by miracles; and what was imparted to them by inspiration, they have communicated to the world by preaching. The gospel, confirmed by divine testimony, we are to make the only rule of our faith. We need the direction and assistance of the Spirit in all the duties of the religious life; but we need no farther *revelation*; nor does the Spirit operate to give us new discoveries, but to assist us in understanding and obeying the gospel which is already given us. Though it were conceded, that immediate revelations were now made, yet these could be of use only to the persons who received them; they could do no good to the world, unless their divine origin were proved by miracles; and therefore all pretentions of this kind are to be discarded.

Let us attend to the mystery of God's will, which is made known to us; prove what is acceptable in his sight; abhor that which is evil; and cleave to that which is good.

We may remark,

2. That God has made known to us his will, *according to the good pleasure, which he purposed in himself.*

It is not owing to any worthiness in us—to any thing which we had done, or could do—to any choice or application which we had made; but to God's wise and gracious purpose, that a revelation is given to the world—that we were born in an age, and in a land of gospel light—that we are distinguished from those nations, which still sit in the region and shadow of death. It is God who makes us to differ—we have nothing but what we received. We may adopt the words of

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our Saviour, "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast revealed to babes the things which thou hast hidden from the wise and prudent; even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight."

We may, perhaps, wonder, why the gospel revelation was not made earlier, and why it is not now more extensive. But we are to remember, that "God works all things according to the counsel of his will;" and, though the reason of his administrations is not made known to us, yet they are all directed by consummate wisdom. To those who enjoy the gospel it is a free gift from God; not the fruit of their desert, but of his good pleasure, which he purposed in himself. He is sovereign in the distribution of his favors. His goodness to us is no wrong to the Heathens. He is not chargeable with injustice in granting to some the privileges which he withholds from others; for none could demand them as their due. He was no more bound to place all men under equal advantages, than to endue all with equal abilities, or to make men equal to angels. He may do what he will with his own. One thing, however, is certain, that to whom much is given, of them much will be required. In the day of the revelation of his righteous judgment, he will take into consideration, not only men's different works, but their various abilities, opportunities and advantages; and he will render to them what is right, according to what they have received and what they have done. "As many as have sinned without law, will perish without law; and as many as have sinned under the law will be judged by the law, in that day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to the gospel."

It is sometimes inquired, whether they who know not the gospel are capable of salvation? But this is a question of little importance to us. The judge of all the earth will do right. It is a more interesting inquiry, whether we have complied with the gospel? How-



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ever God may deal with Heathens, to whom his word has never come, if we put it far from us, we judge ourselves unworthy of eternal life. When men ask, Whether few shall be saved? The answer formerly given is pertinent still, "strive to enter in at the strait gate, for many shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

II. The Apostle goes on to instruct us, that the purpose of God, in making known to us the mystery of his will, is, *that in the dispensation of the fulness of times, he might gather together in one, all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are in earth.*

There are several things here worthy of distinct notice.

1. The gospel is called *the dispensation of the fulness of times.* So it is said elsewhere, "*In due time* Christ died for us." "When *the fulness of the times* was come, God sent forth his Son."

The Jews divided the duration of the world into three periods; one before the law, one under the law, and the other under the Messiah. In regard to this distinction, the gospel age is the fulness, or completion of the times.

This is the last dispensation of religion, that will ever be made; a kingdom which will never be moved; never be set aside to make room for a better. The gospel day is therefore called the *last times—the latter days*—the *end of the world*, or of the *ages*.

The gospel was introduced at the time exactly ordained in the purpose, and expressly predicted in the word of God; and in this sense, it may be called the dispensation of the fulness of times. The prophesies of the Old Testament so accurately stated in the time of the Messiah's appearance, that, as the prophet says, he was the *desire*, or expectation *of all nations*. At the time of his coming, many among the Gentiles, as well as Jews, were earnestly looking for some extraor-

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dinary person, who should take into his hands, the government of the nations.

This was also the fittest time for the introduction of the gospel dispensation. All things were ready for the appearance of the great Redeemer to set up his kingdom in the world. God, for many ages, had been making preparations for this grand event. He foretold it to our first parents after their lapse—to many godly men before the flood—and again to the patriarchs after it. From among the nations of the earth, he chose the posterity of Abraham to be his peculiar people. To them he committed his oracles, gave his ordinances, and sent his prophets to notify them of this dispensation, and of the *time when*, and the manner in which *it should be introduced*. As the time drew nearer, the prophecies became more plain and explicit. The frequent captivities of the Jews were the means of spreading among other nations the knowledge of these prophecies and of the great events which they foretold. The Jews were at this time so corrupt, that they needed, more than ever before, the ministrations of a teacher from heaven.—To them the gospel was first preached; but by their obstinate impenitence and unbelief, they *put* it from them; and by their fall salvation came to the Gentiles. Captivated by their enemies, and scattered over the face of the earth, they became the providential instruments of diffusing the knowledge of the Saviour. The improvement of learning awakened the attention of mankind to this new revelation, and to the heralds who proclaimed it. The extensive power of the Romans, their intercourse with all nations and the universal peace which now reigned in the world, opened a way for the more easy and speedy propagation of the gospel. The spirit of iniquity, which prevailed among the learned, led them strictly to examine the nature and evidences of this new religion; so that there could be no ground to allege, that it obtained credit through the ignorance and credulity of mankind.

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All circumstances concurred to make the time of Christ's appearance the most suitable for the establishment and diffusion of his religion; and therefore it may, with great propriety, be called *the fulness of the times.*

Let us adore the wisdom of God, who orders all events in the most perfect manner, and accomplishes all his purposes in the most convenient time. Let us rejoice that the world, and all things in it, are under the government of an all perfect being. The wisdom which appears in this dispensation of the fulness of times, encourages us to commit all our ways to him, to trust all our concerns in his hands, to acquiesce in all the disposals of his Providence, and to do his will without murmuring and disputing.

2. The Apostle teaches us, that one end of this dispensation was, *that God might gather together in one, all things in Christ:* Or, as the Apostle expresses it, in the next chapter, *that he might make both* Jew *and* Gentile *to be one, might break down the middle wall of partition between them, might abolish the enmity, reconcile both to himself in one body,* or one church, *and make of the twain one new man.*

Though God first admitted the Jews to the peculiar privileges of his church, yet he promised, that, when the Saviour should come, all nations in him should be blessed. Jesus confined his personal ministry, and he first sent his Apostles to the Jews; for to them the word of God was first to be spoken. But after his resurrection he commanded them to go and preach the gospel to all nations, and to gather into one church all men in Christ, of whatever nation they were.

We see then, and it is worthy to be remembered, that one great design of the Christian dispensation is, to form one body in Christ—to collect one church, one great kingdom under him. The convenience of worship requires Christians to erect particular churches; but all these are members of one body; for Christ

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is not divided. The body which is one hath many members; but all these are one body in Christ. Therefore, as our Apostle says, there should be no schism, no rent or division, in the body. We should regard, as members of Christ's church, all who in every place call on the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both theirs and ours. All particular churches ought to own one another as members of the same great body, and have fellowship together as such. Though they meet in different places, entertain different sentiments in the less important things of religion, and adopt some different usages in the forms of discipline and worship, yet, as long as they hold the head and call on the name of the same Lord, they are to treat one another as sister churches, and to cooperate in building up the same grand cause which all profess to regard.

Hence then it appears, that they who break and disunite the church of Christ, and create schisms and divisions in it—they who separate from, and renounce communion with Christian societies without cause, or for small and trivial differences—they who, instead of laboring to reform what they see irregular in churches, endeavor to pull them down, and on the ruins to build up a party of their own; *these* act in direct opposition to the will of Christ and to the design of his gospel. They serve not the Lord Jesus Christ, but their own passions and lusts. They counteract the Apostolic plan, which was to collect into one all things in Christ.

3. The Apostle farther teaches us, that the gospel is intended to unite in Christ all things, *both which are in heaven, and which are in earth.*

The church of Christ consists of *the whole family in heaven and earth.* The saints in heaven were saved in the same way, in which we also must be saved. They are worshipping the same God and the same Redeemer, whom we profess to worship. They are subject to the same Lord, to whom we are subject: Yea, all the angels adore and obey him. They are minis-

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tering spirits to the church below. They are the servants of the same Lord Jesus, and own themselves to be but fellow servants with the saints on earth. The religion of the saints above and of those below is in substance the same; a religion of piety and benevolence. The chief difference lies in the degrees of perfection. The church in heaven and the church on earth are, in some respects, one church united. Believers are fellow citizens with the saints in glory, and of the household of God. The design of the gospel is to form the members of Christ's church on earth to a nearer resemblance of saints and angels in heaven, and to bring them to the general assembly and church of holy beings, to an innumerable company of angels, and to the spirits of just men made perfect; and thus finally to gather together in one all things, both which are in heaven, and which are in earth.

Here, my brethren, is a powerful argument for Christian love. In heaven charity never fails. If we all profess to be seeking the same heaven, and hope to be gathered in one church there, let us exercise that love to one another, which is necessary to prepare us for heaven, and without which heaven would cease to be itself.

Here is also an argument for Christian candor. If the saints, yea, the angels in heaven, who are so exalted in dignity—so improved in knowledge—so perfect in holiness, still own the church on earth, minister to the heirs of salvation, have intercourse with them as one family, and rejoice in the expectation of receiving them to their company above; surely we ought to condescend to our weaker brethren, bear their infirmities, minister to their wants and receive them to our fellowship. If, because we imagine ourselves more pure, more wise, or more sound in faith, than our brethren, we exclude them from our charity, bid them stand by themselves, and warn them not to come near us in acts of holy communion, our temper is utterly

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unlike to that of the blessed above. Ye, whose religious zeal runs into bigotry, and whose spiritual pride has rooted out charity, look up to heaven—see the condescension, the love, the humility which is there, and be ashamed of yourselves. Without something of the same spirit, you absurdly claim a relation to the household of Christ.

III. In the words of our text, there is another passage, which we will briefly notice. In him we have obtained an inheritance, *that we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.*

These words are spoken to the believing Jews. They were the first who trusted in Christ. The word of God was first sent to the Jewish nation; of that nation were the first believers; and in Jerusalem was the first Christian church. They are said to have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to God's purpose. They were once, as a nation, chosen to be God's distinguished and peculiar people; but because they generally rejected the Saviour, they as a nation were rejected of God. Those, however, who trusted in Christ, had still a place in God's inheritance, and enjoyed a portion in his kingdom. They, with the believing Gentiles, were made heirs of God, not only to the privileges of his church on earth, but to an inheritance also in the heavens. In both these respects believers have obtained an inheritance.

They enjoy the privileges of God's children on earth, such as his word, worship and ordinances, the presence of his Spirit, the protection of his Providence, access to him in prayer, and an interest in his promises. And they are made meet for, are sealed unto, and become heirs of a glorious inheritance in heaven. This is so clearly made over, and so firmly secured to them by God's gracious promise, that they are said to have already *obtained* it. They are by faith united to Jesus, and are made joint heirs with him, who, as their forerunner, has gone to heaven and taken possession of

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the inheritance for them. Their life is hidden with Christ in God—the glory is laid up, and the inheritance is reserved for them—they are risen with Christ, and made to sit together with him in heavenly places.

The Apostle instructs them, that, as they had *first* obtained an inheritance, and *first* trusted in Christ, so they should first be *to the praise of God's glory.*

All Christians are bound to glorify God, and shew forth the praises of him, who has called them out of darkness into his marvellous light. They are to abound in all the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ to the praise and glory of God. But there are some peculiar obligations on those, who first trusted in Christ. They, who enjoy superior religious advantages—who through grace have been made partakers of the blessings of the gospel—who have felt the power and tasted the pleasures of religion—who have taken on them the Christian profession and character—who have advanced in age and made proficiency in knowledge, *they* should remember, that, of all men, they are bound to live to the praise of God's glorious grace. They should use their influence for the conversion of sinners, for the confirmation of weak believers, for the advancement of religion, and for the promotion of Christ's kingdom. If they walk according to the course of the world, they dishonor the name by which they are called, embolden the wicked, and cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of. If they, who profess to have believed in Christ, and to have obtained an inheritance with him, still live, as if their only inheritance and only hope were in this world, they expose the gospel to contempt.

Let us then, as many as call ourselves Christians, walk worthy of our name and character. Let us be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke. Let us have our conversation as it becomes the gospel, that none may speak against us as evil doers,

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but by our good works, which they behold, may glorify God in the day of visitation.

Let us admire and adore that all wise and almighty Being, who works all things after the counsel of his will, and makes them all subservient to the praise of his glory.

God brings forth good out of evil, and overrules to the honor of his great name those things which in themselves have a contrary aspect. The apostasy of man, though in its nature it tended to God's dishonor, has been the occasion of displaying his glory in the brightest lustre. The grace and mercy of God in the salvation of penitent believing souls, appear more glorious, than they would have appeared, in any way at present known to us, if there had been no such worthless objects in his creation. The holiness and justice of God are more strongly represented in Christ's sufferings for our sins, than in any other way with which we are acquainted. The angels, who dwell in God's presence, know more of his manifold wisdom and unbounded love, by means of the redemption, than they had ever before learned from his other works. The evil of sin is in this dispensation more awfully manifested, than in all the prohibitions and threatenings of the law. Though the sins of men tend to disturb the harmony of God's government, and mar the beauty of his creation, yet he can overrule them to a different purpose, and make them subservient to his glory, and to the eventual happiness of his obedient subjects.

Shall we then say, Sin is not an evil; or the evil of it is small? No: But we will say, God's wisdom is great and his ways unsearchable. Shall we make light of sin, because God can turn it to his own praise? No: But we will admire his goodness, wisdom and power, who does great things, which we know not and cannot comprehend. Shall we say, that sin is a necessary part of God's plan, because some happy events have followed from particular transgressions? No: But we will re-



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member, that the same infinite wisdom, which could make good to follow from such unpromising and untoward means, can never be at a loss for means to accomplish the purposes of unbounded benevolence. When we see the mischief and confusion, which wicked men make in the world, we will rejoice, that God reigns, and that he turns to good the things, which they intend for evil. We will not be anxious and distrustful in any circumstances, for he who has done so great things for the redemption of fallen men, will never forsake the souls, who love and serve him, but will cause all things to work together for their good.

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# SERMON VII.

## *The Sealing and Earnest of the Spirit.*

EPHESIANS i. 13. 14.

*In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation; in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.*

IN the days of the Apostles, there were Jews scattered through most of the provinces of the Roman Empire. Numbers of them were in Ephesus, where they had a synagogue. When Paul preached the gospel in this city, many of the Jews, as well as Greeks, received it, and both united in one church. One design of this epistle is, to guard them against any disunion, which might arise between them, on account of former differences of nation and religion. The Apostle tells them, that one purpose for which God had made known the mystery of his will was, that, in the dispensation of the fulness of times, he might gather all things together in one body in Christ. In the 11th verse, speaking to the *Jews*, he says, *We have obtained an inheritance in Christ, that we should be to the praise of God's glory who first trusted in Christ.* In our text, speaking to the *Gentile* believers, he says, *In him ye also trusted after ye heard the word of truth*

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The Jews first trusted in Christ, for to them the gospel was first sent. But the Greeks in Ephesus discovered a disposition no less honest and commendable; for, when they heard the word of salvation, they also believed; and, having believed, they were sealed with the holy spirit of promise.

There are three things observable in these words.

I. The object of the faith of these Ephesians. *The word of truth and the gospel of salvation.*

II. The forwardness, and yet the reasonableness of their faith. *They trusted in Christ after they heard the word.*

III. The happy consequence of their faith. *After they believed, they were sealed with the holy Spirit*, &c.

I. The gospel, which the Ephesians believed, is called *the word of truth, and the gospel of salvation.*

It is the *word of truth.* It contains all that truth which concerns our present duty and our future glory. It declares the whole counsel of God, relating to the recovery of our fallen race. Christ himself came to bear witness to the truth, that all men by him might believe; and the Apostles were sent forth to make a more full discovery of all things, which Jesus began to do and to teach.

The gospel comes attended with demonstrations of its own divinity: In this sense it is the word of truth. When Paul taught in Ephesus, "he persuaded the things concerning the kingdom of God." And "by his hands God wrought special miracles" for the confirmation of the doctrine which he preached. The spiritual nature, benevolent design and holy tendency of the gospel; the miracles which attended its first publication; its support and propagation in the world against all the attempts made to destroy it; the accomplishment, which in every age has been made, and still is making, of the prophecies contained in it, are undeniable evidences of its heavenly original.

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*It is called the gospel of our salvation.* The design of it is to bring salvation to our guilty race. It discovers to us our ruined, helpless condition; the mercy of God to give us salvation; the way in which it is procured for us; the terms on which we may become interested in it; the evidences by which our title to it must be ascertained; and the glory and happiness which it comprehends.

II. The second thing observable in the text is the commendable disposition, which these Ephesians discovered when the gospel was preached to them. *They trusted in Christ, after they heard the word of truth.* They acted as honest and rational men: They did not trust before they heard it, nor refuse to trust after they heard it. They did not take the gospel upon the credit of other men, without examination; nor did they reject it, when they had an opportunity to examine it for themselves.

While Paul preached in the city, Jews and Greeks came and heard the word. The miracles which he wrought in healing diseases and casting out evil spirits, gave such full demonstration of a divine power attending him, that, though divers were hardened, many believed, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified. The example of the believers at Ephesus teaches us, in what manner we should hear the word. While we guard against a blind credulity, which receives for truth whatever is agreeable to our humor, or is recommended by popular opinion; we must be careful not to fall into an obstinacy and perverseness, which believes nothing, unless it agrees with our preconceived notions, or favors our worldly interest.—The Ephesians did not believe the gospel, because some others believed it, nor did they reject it, because divers were hardened and spake against it; but they judged for themselves. They heard as they had opportunity, attended to the evidence set before them, and, after they had heard, they believed. Their faith stood not

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in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. I proceed,

III. To consider the happy consequence of their faith in Christ. *In whom, after ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the redemption of the purchased possession.*

The subjects of this *sealing* are *believers*. *After ye believed*, ye were sealed. The sealing here spoken of is not a common effect of the gospel on all who hear it, but a special consequence of it to those who receive it.

This sealing is a work of the Spirit, as a Spirit of *holiness*, *promised* to believers. Ye were sealed with the holy Spirit of *promise*. It must therefore be some *holy* effect produced in the hearts of Christians by the Spirit operating with the word of truth; and such an effect as corresponds with that holy design, for which the Spirit was promised. The Spirit promised to believers dwells in them, as "a Spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind. The fruit of the Spirit is all goodness, and righteousness, and truth."

The Spirit, in consequence of this sealing, is to believers *an earnest of their inheritance, till the redemption of the purchased possession*—till the redemption of the body from the grave to a state of immortality.

So that the general sense of the words is, that the Ephesian believers, in consequence of their faith became partakers of such a divine influence, as sanctified them to a meetness for heaven, and thus evidenced their title to it.

We will distinctly attend to these two metaphors, the *sealing*, and the *earnest* of the Spirit.

1. The *sealing* of the Spirit. The same metaphor is again used, chapter iv. 30. *Grieve not the Spirit of God, whereby ye are* sealed *to the day of redemption.* And 2 Cor. i. 22. *He who hath anointed us is God, who hath also* sealed *us.*

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*Sealing* literally signifies the impression of the image or likeness of one thing upon another. Job speaks of "the *clay* as turned to the *seal.*" A seal impressed on wax leaves there its own image. *Instruction* is said to be *sealed*, when it is so impressed on the heart, as to have an abiding influence. So the sealing of believers is their receiving on their hearts the divine image and character, by the sanctifying power of the holy Spirit. The word of truth is here considered, as the *seal;* the believing heart, as the subject; the holy Spirit, as the agent or sealer; and the effect produced, as a divine likeness. True Christians, by the sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth, are transformed into the image of God, assimilated to the precepts of the gospel, and wrought into that temper which is the fruit of the Spirit. Accordingly, they who know the truth as it is in Jesus, are said "to have put off the old man—to be renewed in the spirit of their mind—to be created after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness—to be made partakers of a divine nature—and, beholding the glory of the Lord, to be changed into the same image.

By a like metaphor, Christians are represented as cast *in the mould* of the gospel. The Apostle says to the Romans, "Ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart, that form of doctrine which was delivered to you." Or as it is in the margin, "Ye have obeyed that form of doctrine, into which ye were delivered." It is a metaphor taken from casting metals into a mould. Ye are in your hearts conformed to that type, or mould, into which ye have been cast. The hearts of believers correspond with the word of truth, as metals take the figure of the mould into which they are received, and as wax bears the image of the seal impressed upon it.

The same idea is conveyed by the metaphor of *writing the word on the heart.* The Apostle says to the Corinthians, "Ye are the epistle of Christ ministered

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by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in the fleshly tables of the heart." And on this account he calls them "the *seal* of his Apostleship in the Lord."

If then your hearts are transformed into the temper of the gospel—if you are governed by the doctrines and subjected to the precepts of it—if you possess those holy dispositions which are the fruits of the Spirit, you are *sealed* by the holy Spirit of promise.

This work of sanctification is called *sealing*, because it consists in a correspondence between the temper of the soul, and the word of truth; as sealing implies a correspondence between the image on the seal, and the impression left on the wax: And it is ascribed to the Spirit, because it is by his gracious influence, that the word is made effectual to sanctify the soul. Having illustrated the *sealing*, we proceed,

2. To consider the *earnest* of the Spirit.

The Spirit, having sealed believers, or sanctified them after God's image, becomes an *earnest* of their inheritance. The same sentiment often occurs in Paul's writings. He says to the Corinthians, "God hath anointed us, and sealed us, and given *the earnest of the Spirit* in our hearts.——He who hath wrought us to this thing," the desire of immortality, "is God, who hath also given us *the earnest of the Spirit;* we are confident therefore and willing to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord." What he here calls the *earnest*, he, in the 8th chapter to Romans, calls the *first fruits* of the Spirit. "We, who have the *first fruits* of the Spirit, groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of the body."

It appears from these passages, that the *earnest*, and the *first fruits* of the Spirit, are some kind of evidence, which the Spirit gives believers, of their title to a happy immortality. The *first fruits* were pledges of the ensuing harvest: *Earnest* money in a contract, is a pledge of the fulfilment of it. So the graces and com-

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forts of religion are to Christians, the anticipations and foretastes of the happiness, which awaits them in heaven.

(1.) The virtues of the Christian temper, which are called the fruits of the Spirit, are to believers an earnest of their inheritance, because they are, in part, a *fulfilment* of the *promise*, which *conveys* the inheritance. They receive the promise of the Spirit, as well as of eternal life, through faith. "Ask and ye shall receive," says our Lord; "seek and ye shall find—for your heavenly Father giveth the holy Spirit to them who ask him." Now if you sensibly experience the benefit of communion with God; if you find, that by attendance upon him in prayer, hearing the word and other ordinances, your faith is enlivened, your worldly affections subdued, your zeal in duty warmed, and your virtuous resolutions strengthened, then you see that promise fulfilled, which insures to you the benefit of attending on these means; and God's performance of this promise is an earnest, that he will do all that he has spoken, and will withhold no good thing which he has promised.

(2.) The graces of the Spirit are an earnest of the inheritance, as they are *preparatives* for it. If you educate a son for a particular employment, this is to him an earnest and token of your intention to put him into that employment: So God's granting you his Spirit to sanctify and prepare you for glory, is a pledge of his gracious purpose of bringing you to glory. His making you meet to be partakers of the inheritance, is an earnest that he will in due time put you in possession of it. But,

(3.) The *sealing* and sanctifying influence of the Spirit is especially called an earnest of the inheritance, because it is a *part* of the inheritance *given beforehand.*

In the religious life there are some sensible pleasures, which the Christian considers as earnest of the



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superior pleasures reserved for him in the heavenly state. "Wisdom's ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace."—"Great peace have they who love God's law, and nothing shall offend them."

Those tempers in which religion consists, such as love and devotion toward God, benevolence and good will to our fellow creatures, gratitude to benefactors and submission to the divine government, are pleasant and delightful. "The good man is satisfied from himself." And from his present experience he justly concludes, that when these tempers shall be wrought to their perfection in the future world, his joy will be full. There he shall know God as he is, and love him with enlarged and lively powers. There his benevolence, purged from every degree of malice and envy, will rise to its proper height, and spread unconfined. There the wonders of Providence and of grace, unfolded to his view, will awaken new sentiments of gratitude and admiration. A great part of his present unhappiness proceeds from the irregularity of his temper —from unruly passions—inordinate affections—and the working of sin in his members. Hence he knows, that when his present disorders are rectified, and the principles of holiness are perfected, the pleasures of religion will be pure, and no sorrow will be mingled with them.

While he rejoices in the testimony of his conscience, which daily witnesses to his godly sincerity, he thinks how his joy will be heightened, when love shall be made perfect, and his heart shall no more reproach him.

While he experiences the pleasures of that hope, which enters within the vail, he infers, how vastly these pleasures must be improved, when he shall enter within the vail himself, and enjoy what hope now anticipates. The satisfaction, which attends his hours of fervent devotion, is an earnest of the unspeakably greater delight, which he will find in the devotions of heav-

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en, where this sinful flesh will no more obstruct, nor worldly cares divert his spiritual exercises.

Thus the believer has in himself an earnest of the inheritance which is reserved for him, and an evidence of the divine original of the religion which he has received. The Apostle John says, "He who believeth on the Son, hath the witness in himself."

The Spirit is the earnest of our inheritance, *until the redemption of the purchased possession.* When we actually possess the inheritance, the earnest will no longer be needed. An earnest supposes the object to be unpossessed: This, enjoyed in its fulness, supersedes the earnest. "When that which is perfect is come, that which is in part will be done away.—We who have the first *fruits* of the Spirit, groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, the redemption of the body; for we are saved by hope! But hope that is seen is not hope, for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that which we see not, then do we with patience wait; and the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities, and maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered."

## REFLECTIONS.

1. Our subject teaches us, that all the operations of the divine Spirit on the minds of men, are of a holy nature and tendency.

The Spirit of promise, which works in believers, is called the *holy* and *good* Spirit, in distinction from the Spirit which works in the children of disobedience, and which is called an *evil* and *unclean* Spirit. If the Spirit is holy, we may conclude, that all his operations tend to holiness, and that the works which he produces are of a holy nature. By this mark we are to judge, whether we are led by the Spirit of God. "They who are after the Spirit, mind the things of the Spirit. If we walk in the Spirit, we shall not fulfil the lusts of the

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flesh."—"They who are sensual have not the Spirit." The fruits of the Spirit and the works of the flesh, stand opposed to each other. We are never to ascribe to the divine Spirit any thing, but what is agreeable to the divine character. "Let no man say, when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man; but every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust and enticed."—"Do not err, my beloved brethren; every *good gift* and every *perfect gift*, cometh down from above, from the Father of lights." Good we are to ascribe to him; but not evil, *moral* evil. This is contrary to his nature, and therefore is never the effect of his operation and influence. He is always the same Holy Being. "With him is no variableness, or shadow of turning."

If we would know by what Spirit we are guided, we must compare his operations with the precepts of the gospel. By the gospel we are called to meekness, humility, peaceableness, charity, sobriety, contentment, truth and righteousness: And these are the fruits of the Spirit. Now if we find, that the Spirit which is in us operates to passion, pride, contention, selfconfidence, uncharitableness and contempt of others, we may certainly conclude, that it is not the Spirit of God.

By this rule we are to judge of all impressions, excitations and impulses, which at any time we feel. If we find ourselves strongly impelled to a particular action, we are not at once to conclude, that the impulse is divine, and thence infer that the action is our duty. We are first to examine, whether the action itself is holy and virtuous; and we are to conclude the inward motion prompting us to it, to be from above, or from beneath, according as the conduct in question appears to agree, or disagree with the word of God. We are not to make our own feelings the standard of right and wrong, but to try our feelings by the sober sentiments of reason, and the sure dictates of divine revelation.

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2. Our subject strongly encourages humble souls to apply to God for the needful influences of his grace.

The Spirit of God is called *the holy Spirit of promise.* It is one of those blessings, which God has *promised* to the church. It was promised under the Old Testament; but more fully under the gospel. This is a ministration of the Spirit. Where God sends his gospel, he gives the Spirit to accompany it; and "the Spirit is received in the hearing of faith."—"The Spirit is shed forth abundantly through Jesus Christ, that being justified by faith we may be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."—"Ask and ye shall receive," says our Lord—"for your heavenly Father will give the holy Spirit to them who ask him." On the foot of this promise, believers may come boldly to God's throne; and even sinners, under an awakening sense of their guilt and impotence, may come with humble hope to obtain his grace. This is the voice of divine wisdom, "How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity, and ye scorners, delight in scorning? Turn ye at my reproof: Behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you: I will make known my words unto you." If God has already given them his Spirit to convince them of sin, they may thence collect hope, that he will grant his Spirit to carry their conviction into effect. "Whosoever hath," or improveth what he hath, "to him shall be given." Let none imagine, that the prayers, the reformations and endeavors of awakened sinners, are abomination to God; for he who hath wrought them to these things is God, who hath given them the convincing and awakening influences of his Spirit. And the work of his Spirit—the fruit of his operation on the hearts of men, is not abomination. To call it by this name is not to ascribe righteousness, but wickedness to our Maker.

3. It appears, that we can have no conclusive evidence of a title to heaven, without the experience of a holy temper.

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The *sealing* of the Spirit is the work of sanctification in the soul. It is the impression of the divine image on the inward man. None therefore are sealed to the day of redemption, but those who are partakers of a divine nature. Whatever inward persuasions we may feel, that the heavenly inheritance is ours, if we have not within us a holy principle governing our hearts and lives, we are not meet to be partakers of the inheritance, and can shew no seal of our title to it. The seal of the Spirit is that holiness, which prepares for heaven; and this only is the sure evidence of our claim to it. This sealing is not an inward suggestion or revelation made to the mind, but it is a holy change wrought in the mind. If we are renewed after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness, we have the first fruits of the Spirit, and may wait in hope for the day of redemption.

4. We see that Christians are under indispensable obligations to universal holiness.

Every sin is an injury and dishonor to God; but the sins of believers are, in a peculiar sense, a grief to the Spirit of God, who has sanctified and sealed them. The Apostle therefore improves this sealing as an argument against wickedness of every kind in the professors of the gospel. "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouths, and grieve not the holy Spirit of God. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind one to another."—"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you; if any man defile this temple, him will God destroy, for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are."

If God has given his Spirit to seal you, grieve not this Spirit. If ye run into the allowed practice of sin, or continue impenitent in any iniquity, into which ye have fallen, the Spirit is not then the earnest of your inheritance. You blot and obscure his seal on your

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hearts. And the pollutions with which you have darkened and deformed it, must be washed off by the tears of repentance, before you can there read your title to the inheritance. You must keep your seal fair and bright by the constant exercise of faith, and practice of duty. You must preserve your hope by purifying your souls.—"Know ye not, brethren, that your bodies are the temples of the Holy Ghost, which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? Therefore glorify God in your bodies, and in your spirits, which are God's."

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# SERMON VIII.

## *Faith, Love, Hope, and the high Prospects, to which believers are enlightened.*

EPHESIANS i. 15—20.

*Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers; that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation, in the knowledge of him; the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe according to the working of his mighty power which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead———.*

IN the foregoing verses, the Apostle speaks of the Ephesian believers, as being "sealed with that holy spirit of promise, which was the earnest of their inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession." In the words now read, he mentions two graces, which were eminent marks and characters in that holy seal, which had been impressed upon them. These were, "*Faith* in the Lord Jesus, and, *Love* to all the saints," which are ever to be considered as distinguishing signatures of the heirs of heaven, and seals of their title to the purchased possession.

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The Apostle gives thanks to God for their faith and love, of which he had lately heard, and some effects of which he had formerly seen, while he resided among them.

As there were many from all parts of Asia, who attended on his ministry, when he preached in Ephesus, it is not supposable, that he could be personally acquainted with them all; he therefore speaks of their faith and love, as having been reported to him. Besides: He had now for sometime been absent from them; and he foretold, that after his departure, there would be a great defection from the faith, which accordingly happened, as we learn from his epistles to Timothy: And he probably intends here to express his joy concerning those, of whom he had heard, that in these times of dangerous declension they remained stedfast in the faith. He did not, however, think them so firmly established, as to be secure in that evil day from all the power of temptation; he therefore *prays*, as well as *gives thanks* in their behalf.

What he requested was, in general, that they might have greater knowledge and clearer discernment in divine things; and, particularly, that they might know the exalted hope to which they were called; the glorious inheritance which was provided for them; and the greatness of that power which will work in believers, to raise them unto immortal life, as it had already wrought in raising Christ from the dead, and setting him at God's right hand in heavenly places.

I. Let us consider the things for which the Apostle commends the Ephesians: These are *faith* in Christ, and *love* to all the saints.

*Faith* is such a sensible, realizing belief of the gospel, in its general truth, and in its particular doctrines and precepts, as gives it a practical influence on the heart and life. It "receives *the love* of the truth"—"receives it as the word of God, which effectually works in them who believe."



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Evangelical faith has a particular respect to Jesus Christ, as the great author of the gospel, and as the purchaser of that salvation which it reveals. God has spoken to us by his Son: Faith receives him as a teacher sent from God, and embraces as truth whatever is taught by him. Jesus is the mediator, through whom God shews mercy to guilty men. Faith, therefore, looks up to God through him. "We by Christ believe in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, that our faith and hope might be in God."

True faith is "made perfect by works." The Apostle commends the Thessalonians for the works of faith, which accompanied their good profession. The christian scheme is so vastly important, that one who believes it with the heart, and views it as it is, cannot feel indifferent to it, nor live uninfluenced by it. The Apostle says of the Ephesian believers, "He had *heard* of their faith." Its fruits were so conspicuous, that it was spoken of at a distance. They had not only professed their faith, but stedfastly maintained it in times of great corruption and defection. They had attended on the ordinances of Christ in his church. They had walked in humble obedience to his laws, and in peace and charity with one another; and thus had shewed their faith by their works. Real faith has such a commanding influence in the soul, that "it casts down imaginations and every high thing, which exalts itself against the knowledge of God and brings into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

The faith of the Ephesians toward Christ, was accompanied with "love to all the saints." Where the work of faith is, there will be the labor of love; and where faith grows among Christians, their charity toward each other will abound. The gospel exhibits the most engaging examples of love in the character of the great God, and in the life of Jesus Christ; and it pro-

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poses the most powerful motives to beneficence in all its doctrines and discoveries. Faith, viewing and applying the examples and doctrines of the gospel, purifies the soul unto unfeigned love of the brethren." The end of the cammandment is charity out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned."

The gospel requires us to love *all* men, sinners as well as saints; enemies, as well as friends. The love which we owe to mankind in common, is *benevolence* or *good will*. This consists in a desire of their happiness, and a disposition to promote it. But, besides this, there is another kind of love, which we owe to the *saints*, or those who *appear* to be such. This consists in an *approbation* and *esteem* of their character. This is the same kind of love, as that which we owe to the Deity. So St. John teaches us: "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother, whom he hath seen, how shall he love God, whom he hath not seen? Every one that loveth him who begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him. By this we know, that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep his commandments."

Love to God is an approbation of, and pleasedness with his moral character—his holiness, justice, truth, goodness and mercy. It supposes a conformity to this character, and it implies a desire of becoming more and more assimilated to it. The saints are "partakers of a divine nature:" They are "renewed after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness." If, therefore, we love God for his moral perfections, we shall love the saints, as far as they appear to have these divine qualities wrought into their temper. It is absurd to pretend, that we love the character of God, as long as we disregard this character in our fellow men.

But though love to God, and love to the saints, are the same in their general nature, yet, as they respect

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different objects, they must be diverse in many of their operations. As God is an all perfect Being, love to him will express itself by an intire submission to his will—by a choice of him for our portion—by a preference of his favor to every worldly interest—by a full complacence in him as our happiness—and by a humble acquiescence in all his dispensations and commands. As the saints are but dependent creatures, and as they are holy in a very imperfect measure, they cannot be the objects of these high operations of love.—God only we are to love with all our heart, and soul, and strength, and mind. The saints we are to love with a pure heart fervently, but not with all the heart supremely. Our love to them we must express by choosing them for our companions—by delighting in their virtuous example and heavenly conversation—by cheerfully assisting them in their spiritual interests, and meekly accepting their assistance in ours—by studying the things which make for peace and edification—by communing with them in instituted ordinances—by bearing their infirmities—by condescending to them in cases of difference—and by seeking their profit, as well as our own, that both they and we may be saved.

These Ephesians manifested their love to *all* saints. Their charity was not confined to a party—to those who lived in the same city, and worshipped in the same sanctuary; but it embraced all, who in every place called on the name of Jesus Christ their common Lord.

If our love consists in an attachment to a particular sect, with which we are connected in sentiment, interest, or worldly design, it has nothing of the nature of Christian love. The love which regards the saints for their holy character, will regard *all* in whom this character appears, wherever they dwell, and whatever name they bear. To judge then, whether our love is sincere, we must consider its extent, as well as its effects,

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II. Paul expresses his great *thankfulness* to God for the happy success of the gospel among these Ephesians. "After I heard of your faith and love, I cease not to give thanks."

He rejoiced in the honor which rebounded to the crucified Jesus, who, having made his soul an offering for sin, now saw his seed increasing, and the pleasure of the Lord prospering in his hands. He rejoiced to think, how many immortal souls were now rescued from the power of Satan, delivered from guilt and condemnation, and brought into a state of pardon and safety. He rejoiced in the happy consequences, which might ensue to others from the glorious success of the gospel in Ephesus. He hoped, that from hence the word of God might sound forth to all around, and that the knowledge of the truth might be transmitted to succeeding ages. Here were many pious families, in which religion was maintained, and children trained up in the admonition of the Lord. The blessed effects of Paul's preaching here might hopefully reach to multitudes around, and descend to generations yet unborn. He rejoiced the more in their faith and love, because these were the effects of *his own* preaching. The good minister is pleased to hear of the success of the gospel in any place; but he feels a peculiar pleasure in seeing the success of his own ministry. Paul had an uncommon affection for those, whom he had begotten by the gospel, and he conceived a special joy in the prospect of meeting them in heaven. He says to the Thessalonians—"What is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing?—Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? Ye are our glory and our joy."

If the prevalence of religion is, on so many accounts, matter of thankfulness, we should spare no pains to give it success. Not only ministers, but all Christians should labor in this glorious cause. We should all be solicitous to experience the power of religion in our

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own souls, and to promote it among others, as far as our influence can extend. Ministers should labor abundantly in the work to which they are called, because it is a work, which concerns the honor of Christ's kingdom, and the salvation of men's souls. Professors of religion should so walk, that others may, by their example, be encouraged to walk with them in the way to glory. They and ministers should strive together, in their labors and prayers, for the advancement of the common cause. Heads of families by their prayers, instructions and example should support religion in their houses, and unite their influence for the general maintenance of family government and order. The happy change, which religion makes in the hearts where it is received, and among the people where it prevails, will be a powerful motive with the benevolent Christian, whether in a public or private station, to contribute his influence for its success.

III. The Apostle, not only gives thanks for the past, but prays for the future success of the gospel in Ephesus. "I cease not to give thanks, making mention of you in my prayers." Though he had heard much of their faith and love, he did not consider them, and would not have them consider themselves, as already made perfect; he therefore informs them, that he prayed for them, and thus admonishes them to pray for themselves, that their faith and love might still more abound.

The best Christians have need to make continual improvements. The Apostle exhorts as many as are perfect, to be likeminded with him, who "pressed toward the mark, for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." The greater progress Christians make in knowledge and grace, the more humble they will be under a sense of their deficiency, and the more solicitous to make advances in both. There cannot be a more unfavorable sign, than great confidence in our own attainments. "If we say, we have no sin, we de-

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ceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."—"He who thinks, he knows any thing," and glories in his supposed knowledge, "knows nothing yet as he ought to know." Let us be careful to know ourselves, that "we may not think of ourselves above that which we ought to think, but may think soberly."

The Apostle "made mention of the Ephesians in his prayers." He directs, that "intercessions and giving of thanks be made for all men." He was no less constant in his prayers, than in his labors, for the spiritual interest of mankind. He knew that the success of all his labors depended on God's blessing; he, therefore, added to them his fervent prayers.

If ministers ought to labor and pray for the salvation of others, surely you all ought to do much for your own. The labors of a minister will do you little good, if you are inattentive to your own condition. What will *his* preaching do for you, if *you* will not hear or apply it? Will *his* prayers save you, while you cast off fear and restrain prayer? When ministers and people strive together in their prayers, there is reason to hope for God's blessing on both. We proceed to observe,

IV. The Apostle prayed for the Ephesians, "that God would give them the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the acknowledgment of Christ; and would grant, that the eyes of their understanding might be opened."

They had already known the revelation of the mystery of God's will: The eyes of their understanding had already been enlightened to see and acknowledge the truth of the gospel. But still the Apostle prays, "that God would give them the spirit of wisdom, and intellectual eyes well enlightened." Thus also he prays for the Colossians—"that they might be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding—and might be fruitful in every good work, increasing in the knowledge of God."

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His aim, in all his preaching and writing, was to promote spiritual knowledge, and thus to advance real godliness. He considered religion as a reasonable service, and he would have men believe it on competent evidence, understand its nature, feel its importance, and obey it on suitable motives. His sermons, like his epistles, were full of instruction. His design was, not to amuse the fancy of his hearers, but to "open their eyes, and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God."—"He did not handle the word of God deceitfully," or confusedly; "but used great plainness of speech, and by manifestation of the truth commended himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

His prayers corresponded with his labors. By telling the Ephesians, what were his prayers for them, he instructs them, what should be *their* chief desires for themselves;—he teaches them, that they ought to seek "the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the acknowledgement of Christ;" or wisdom from God to understand the revelation, which he had given them, and which they had acknowledged; and such an illumination of their minds as to discern the nature and perceive the excellence of the things contained in this revelation.

Christians must not content themselves with their present knowledge, but aspire to "all riches of the full assurance of understanding, and to the knowledge of the mystery of God, and of Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom." For this end, they must converse with the holy scriptures—attend on the instituted ministrations of the word—compare spiritual things with spiritual, and compare themselves with the spiritual things which they have learned—guard against prejudices, especially against spiritual pride and selfconfidence—keep their minds open to conviction, and apply all their knowledge to practical uses.

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V. We will consider the several things, which the Apostle prayed, that the Ephesians might understand. These are "the hope of the calling, the glory of the inheritance, and the power of God toward them who believe."

1. He prays, that they might know, "what is the hope of the divine calling;" or the hope to which God had called them.

He says, elsewhere, "God hath called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his purpose and grace." And he exhorts us to "walk worthy of him, who hath called us to his kingdom and glory." The gospel calls us to holiness, as a necessary preparative for glory; and to newness of heart and life, as an indispensable qualification for admission into the kingdom of God. They in whom this call is by divine grace made effectual, "put off the old man with his deeds, and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Being thus renewed in the temper of their minds, "they walk in newness of life." To "walk worthy of God unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work," is to "walk worthy of him, who hath called us to his kingdom."

This calling is accompanied with *hope*. The external call of the gospel is attended with a *general* hope of the heavenly kingdom, as what is *attainable*. Where the call becomes effectual to the renovation of the heart and life, there is a *special* hope of the kingdom, as what is already attained. When we find the power of the gospel operating in our souls to real holiness, we may then apply to ourselves its great and precious promises.

It is of great importance that we *know* the hope of this calling—that we understand the *way* in which we are called to God's kingdom, the *terms* on which we may enter into it, and the *evidence* by which we may ascertain our title to it. We should be watchful, that



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we do not misconceive of the conditions of salvation, or mistake our own characters, and so imagine ourselves to be heirs of the kingdom of glory, while we remain in the kingdom of darkness. We should always bear in mind, that God has called us with an *holy* calling—has chosen us to be *holy* and *without blame*—has appointed us to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit, and that none are entitled to the heavenly inheritance, but those who, by the renewing of their minds are made meet to be partakers of it. We, are therefore, to hope for it only in a way of holiness; and the proper influence of this hope, is to purify our souls as Christ is pure.

2. The Apostle prays, that they may know—"what is the riches of the glory of God's inheritance in the saints;" or, what a rich and glorious inheritance God has prepared for, and promised to them.

This is what none can fully comprehend. We may, however, by revelation know so much of it, as to be well assured, that it is rich and glorious. It is "an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, fading not away, reserved in heaven for the faithful."

It is GOD's inheritance; that which he has provided and reserved for his own children; and he gives liberally:—It is a *purchased* possession; and the purchase was not made with corruptible things, such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Jesus the Son of God:—It is an inheritance for the *saints*; for them whom God hath chosen to be holy, and predestinated to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ, and whom he hath sanctified by his Spirit, and sealed unto the day of redemption:—It is an inheritance bestowed by God's *abundant* love; and as it comes from the riches of the glory of his grace, the gift itself must be rich and glorious. Though we cannot comprehend its dimensions, nor compute its value, yet when we consider the grace of the Being who conveys it, the riches of the price which bought it, and the divine prepara-

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tion by which the heirs are formed to enjoy it, we must conceive it to be unspeakably glorious.—Many important properties of this inheritance the scripture enumerates; and finally sums up all in these comprehensive words, "He that overcometh shall inherit ALL THINGS."

Lastly: The Apostle desires, that Christians may know, "what is the exceeding greatness of God's power toward them that believe, according to the working of his mighty power, which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead."

When the Christian contemplates the glorious inheritance, which awaits him in the heavenly world, the joy which begins to kindle in his soul is, sometimes, damped by the thought of that gloomy valley which lies in the way. Death and the grave are before him;—the body must be dissolved—must moulder away under the clods of the earth, and be reduced to its primitive dust;—and this soul—this conscious, thinking mind, which has never yet existed without a body;—Where, and what will it be? It can have little conception of a separate, unbodied state; for this is wholly unexperienced. How dark the prospect!—But this gloomy scene the gospel has enlightened; it reveals to us a resurrection of the body, and a happy reunion of it to the soul; in which new state we shall exist for ever. To strengthen our faith it refers us to the work of God's mighty power in raising Christ from the dead; and from this glorious instance leads us to conceive the exceeding greatness of his power in raising from the dead them who believe in Jesus, and in transforming these vile bodies to such a spiritual and immortal state, and they shall be forever capable of enjoying the heavenly inheritance. Of this power the believer has already had some experience in the quickening of his soul, once dead in trespasses and in sins, to a holy and divine life.

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If we have been quickened with Christ to a spiritual life, we shall also be raised with him to eternal life, and be made to sit with him in heavenly places. If we are dead to this world, our life is hidden in another—hidden with Christ in God; and when Christ shall appear we also shall appear with him in glory. "If the Spirit of him, who raised up Jesus from the dead, dwell in us, he that raised up Jesus, shall also quicken our mortal bodies by his Spirit which dwelleth in us. Therefore "let us not walk after the flesh, but through the Spirit mortify the deeds of the body, that we may live." If we expect to rise with Christ, "let us now seek the things which are above, where Christ is."—"Let us have our conversation in heaven, from whence we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall change our vile body, and fashion it like unto his own glorious body, according to that mighty working, whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself."

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# SERMON IX.

## *The Exaltation of Christ.*

EPHESIANS I. 19—23.

*According to the working of his mighty power which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power, and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be head over all things to the church, which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.*

IN the preceding words, Saint Paul prays for the Ephesian believers, that, in the acknowledgment of the gospel of Christ, they might have the spirit of wisdom to understand the revelation given them or the preaching of the Apostles; and that their intellectual eyes might be enlightened to know the ground and the terms of that hope to which they were called, the glorious riches of that inheritance which was provided for them, and the exceeding greatness of that power, which by raising them from the dead, should put them in possession of the heavenly inheritance. To strengthen their faith in God's power and promise, and to aid their conceptions of the glory of this inheritance; the Apostle refers them to the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ, and to that dominion and dignity.

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which he now enjoys, as the reward of his sufferings in the flesh.

The several important steps of Christ's exaltation are contained in the words now read: These are his resurrection from the dead—his ascension to, and session at the right hand of God—his advancement, far above all principality and power, to supreme dominion over all things—and the glorious end of his dominion, even the benefit of the church which is his body, the fulness of him who filleth all in all.

I. The first step of Christ's exaltation was his resurrection from the dead.

The plan which the wisdom of God laid for the redemption of our fallen race, was the death of Jesus Christ; who, though a holy and divine person, "was made in the likeness of our sinful flesh, that by a sacrifice for sin he might condemn sin in the flesh." But the scheme of God's wisdom did not end with the *death* of the Redeemer. If he had remained under the power of death, our hopes must have died with him. His resurrection was necessary, that we might have a convincing proof of his divine character and mission—of the truth of his gospel—of God's acceptance of the sacrifice offered—and of the certainty of our own resurrection and future existence. God therefore took particular care to render this important event certain and indubitable.

Our divine Lord, during his ministry, often foretold his own approaching death and the ressurrection which would speedily follow. He pointed out the exact time of his resurrection, and referred not only his disciples, but the unbelieving Jews to this humanly improbable event, as the grand and decisive proof of his heavenly authority.

Jesus Christ was crucified in the most public manner, and the reality of his death was made evident beyond a possibility of doubt. He was buried in a new tomb, in which never man before was laid; so that, if

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any one rose from thence, *he* must be the person. The tomb was hewn out in a rock, so that there could be no secret conveyance of the body from thence by a subterraneous passage. To prevent a clandestine removal of the body, which the priests and Pharisees pretended to fear; a stone was rolled to the mouth of the grave, a seal was put upon it, and a party of soldiers set to guard it. Notwithstanding these precautions, the tomb on the third day was found empty. The body was not there. That it could not be stolen away by the disciples, was evident from the precautions taken to prevent it, as well as from the circumstances of the disciples, who were then dispersed by fear. It must, therefore, have been raised by a miracle. And this the soldiers confessed. Early on the first day of the week, there was an earthquake; an angel descended in a glorious form, and in the presence of the guards, rolled away the stone, and sat upon it. The soldiers, affrighted at the vision, hastened into the city, and reported to the priests what they had seen. The priests, convinced of the fact, but unwilling it should be believed, bribed the soldiers to report an inconsistent story, that the body was stolen away while they were asleep. After his resurrection, he repeatedly appeared to, and conversed with those, who having intimately known him before, could not be deceived in his person; and they uniformly testified to his resurrection, and persisted in their testimony to the death.

This miracle is an incontestible evidence of the truth of the Christian religion; and particularly an evidence of the great doctrine of the resurrection of the body and a future life, and of the efficacy of Christ's blood to expiate the guilt of our sins.

The Apostle says, Christ was raised from the dead "by the working of God's mighty power." The Heathens "thought it a thing incredible, that God should raise the dead." They did not conceive it pos-

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sible, that a body once dead should be again restored to life. But "they erred, not knowing the power of God." To remove all doubts concerning the possibility of a resurrection, God has placed before us this plain, sensible fact; and if we believe, that Jesus died and rose again, we must believe that the same mighty power, which wrought in him, can also work in us to raise us from the dead. The same glorious Saviour, who taught the doctrine of the resurrection, has given a demonstration of it in his own resurrection, by which he became the first fruits of them who sleep.

We are begotten to a lively hope by the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Believers united to him are represented as being already raised up in him. To express the certainty of the event the Apostle says, "God *hath* quickened and raised us up with Christ."

II. The next step of Christ's exaltation is his ascension to heaven and session at God's right hand. "God hath set him at his own right hand in heavenly places."

After Jesus had risen from the grave, and shewed himself alive to his disciples by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God he repaired to Bethany, where he had commanded them to assemble; and there, in the presence of more than five hundred brethren, he visibly rose into the air, blessing them as he departed from them, and was received into a cloud; probably such a bright, resplendant cloud, as that which formerly rested on the tabernacle, and which appeared on the mount at the transfiguration; and on this cloud he ascended out of their sight into the glorious heavens, where, it is said "he sat down on the right hand of God."

By this phrase the scriptures often express Christ's state in the world above. As God is a Spirit, he can have neither right hand nor left. Bodily parts are ascribed to him figuratively, to denote those qualities,

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which in us are exercised by the means of such corporeal members. As the hand is the chief instrument of exerting strength, it is applied to God to signify his mighty power. The *right* hand is among men the usual place of honor and respect; and therefore denotes, in our text, superior dignity. *Sitting*, in the case before us, intends not any posture of body, but the things implied in that posture. The prophet describes a state of peace and security, by every man's *sitting* under his own vine. In allusion to this use of the metaphor, Christ is said to *sit* on God's right hand, to signify that he has ceased from his labors and sufferings, and entered into a state of repose and joy. Sitting also denotes *continuance* in the same place. Christ is therefore said to sit on God's right hand, to signify that the heavens have received him, until the time of the restitution or completion of all things. It farther imports *authority and power*; and is hence applied to Christ to express his dominion over the natural and moral world.

Christ is exalted to the right hand of God, not only as a ruler, but also as an *intercessor*. "He has entered into the holy place to appear in the presence of God for us." In the character of an advocate, he is described as being on God's right hand to signify his nearness to God, and the prevalence of his intercession. "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died; yea rather, that is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God; who also maketh intercession for us." But it is observable, that the scripture, when it speaks of Christ as *interceding*, or *acting* in behalf of believers, describes him, not as *sitting*, but as *being*, or *standing* on God's right hand, to signify his gracious attention to their exigencies and wants. Paul says, "He *is* at the right hand of God, making intercession." When Stephen called on Jesus to receive his spirit, he said, "I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man *standing* on the right hand of God."



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John says, "In the midst of the throne and of the elders, there *stood* a Lamb, as it had been slain."

So wonderfully the scripture condescends to our manner of conceiving and speaking, that it may encourage our faith and hope. *Sitting* is a posture of dignity and repose: *Standing* is a posture of attention and earnestness. Christ is exhibited to us in the latter attitude, to signify how graciously he regards our necessities—how readily he affords us help in the time of need—how fervently he intercedes for us, when we draw near to God in his name. And he is said to be on God's right hand, to signify his power to grant us whatever our wants require, and his interest with the Father to obtain for us an answer to our humble requests. When faith beholds the divine Saviour in this powerful state, and in this interceding attitude, Will it not encourage us to prayer, animate us to duty, fortify us against fear, and comfort us in death? Let us seek the things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God; and set our affections on things above, and not on things which are on the earth; for our life is hidden with Christ in God.

III. The Apostle farther instructs us, that "God has set Jesus Christ in heavenly places, far above all principality and power, and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come, and hath put all things under his feet." In like manner he describes Christ's glorified state, in his epistle to the Philippians. "Being found in fashion, as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth, and every tongue should confess, that he is Lord to the Glory of God the Father."

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It is the doctrine of this Apostle, that Jesus Christ is "the image of the invisible God, the first born," i. e. the heir, or the Lord, "of the whole creation; for by him all things were created in heaven and earth, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers; and he is before all things, and by him all things consist." As the divine creator, he is naturally and essentially possessed of supreme dominion over all creatures. When he became flesh and dwelt among men, the Apostle says, "He made himself of no reputation; he took on him the form of a servant; he humbled himself, and was obedient to the death." In reward of this humiliation and obedience, he is highly exalted above all principality and power, and is made head over all things. Though his essential kingdom is coeternal with himself, yet there is a mediatorial kingdom, to which he was exalted in time and in consequence of his mediatorship. This kingdom had a beginning, and will have an end. It commenced with the covenant of grace; it was solemnly announced in its full extent, at the time of his ascension; and it will terminate at the final judgment, when he will deliver it up to the Father.

The Apostle describes this kingdom, as extending to all creatures in heaven, on earth, and under the earth. All the angels of God worship him; they are subject to his authority, devoted to his pleasure, and employed in his service. The government of the natural world is in his hands; he guides the wheels of Providence; he directs and overrules all events according to the scheme of the divine counsel. He is represented in the revelation, as receiving from the right hand of him who sits on the throne, the book which contains the decrees and purposes of Providence, and as breaking the seals, and opening the leaves of this book in their successive order. When he received the book, the whole consistory of saints and angels fell down before him, saying, "Thou art

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worthy to take the book and open the seals thereof, for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us unto God with thy blood."

The government of the Church is in the hands of Jesus Christ. He has instituted laws and ordinances in it, and has appointed officers to administer them. He dispenses the influences of the divine Spirit to give power and efficacy to his word. He watches over his church to defend it from enemies. He will one day enlarge its bounds, and render it more glorious, than it has ever yet been, in its extent, its numbers and its purity.

He has dominion over devils. His superiority to them he displayed on earth, by expelling them with his word from their ancient possessions. They fell as lightning from heaven before the power of his name. "He spoiled principalities and powers and made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them on the cross." Though he has not perfectly extinguished their influence among men, yet he has greatly diminished it by the light of his gospel; and he sets bounds to their power. He will not suffer their malice so far to prevail, as to pluck out of his hands any of the souls which believe in him; much less to subvert and destroy his church: This he has built upon a rock, and against it the gates of hell will never prevail. In the Revelation, St. John describes the conflict between the kingdom of Christ, and the kingdom of Satan, as issuing in a complete and final victory of the former over the latter. "There was war in heaven; Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon fought and his angels, and prevailed not; neither was their place any more found in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent called the devil and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world, and his angels were cast out with him."

The last and most glorious act of Christ's supreme dominion is the judgment of the world. "God has

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committed all judgment to the Son." As Jesus has gone into heaven; so, we are told, he will, in some unknown period, come down from heaven in flaming fire, attended with all his mighty angels. He will appear sitting on the throne of his glory, and before him all nations will be gathered; and every man will be judged according to his works. They who are found approved, will be received into that glorious kingdom, into which nothing can enter that defiles. But unbelievers and hypocrites, the disobedient and abominable will be cast into the place of everlasting punishment prepared for the devil and his angels. Then will these material heavens pass away, and the earth with its works will be burnt up; and the great Redeemer, having finished the solemn trial, will return to his exalted seat in the heavens, attended with his exulting train, who will enter with songs of joy and praise into the kingdom prepared for them from the foundation of the world. When Christ shall have put down all rule, and principality and power, shall have destroyed the last enemy, death, and shall have made the final distribution of rewards and punishments; then shall he deliver up the kingdom to the Father, that God may be all in all.

In the view and expectation of this solemn and tremendous scene, let us now humbly submit to the government of Jesus Christ, and thankfully accept the gracious proposals of his gospel. Let us be careful what manner of persons we are in all holy conversation. Let us judge ourselves, that we may not be condemned with the world. This is the divine admonition to the children of men: "Behold I have set my king on my holy hill of Zion—I will give him the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession—He shall rule them with a rod of iron, and break them in pieces like a potter's vessel. Be wise now, therefore, ; serve ye the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling. Kiss ye the Son, lest he be angry and ye perish from the

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way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

IV. We proceed to consider the *end* for which Christ exercises his high and extensive dominion. "He is made head over all things for the church, which is his body, the fulness of him, who filleth all in all."

The church here, as often elsewhere, is called a *body*, to signify the harmony and union, which ought to subsist among its various parts. "The body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ;" or the Christian church. In this body, there ought to be no schism, no rent or division; but all the members should have the same care for one another, as each for itself. This thought the Apostle resumes in the 4th chapter of this epistle. "Let us endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, for there is one body, and one Spirit."

The church is called the body of *Christ*, because he is its head; and all the members, being united to him, take their direction, and draw their support from him; and he exercises a continual care and concern for them. He loved the church and gave himself for it. He loves it still, and feeds and sustains it.

The church is "the fulness of him who filleth all in all." Jesus ascended on high, that he might receive gifts to bestow them on men. He has given his word and ordinances, ordained pastors and teachers, and shed down divine and heavenly influences, "for the edifying of the church, until we all come, in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

"He ascended far above all" these visible "heavens, that he might fill all things" with his gifts according to his promise to his diciples, that he would send them the Spirit to comfort and teach them, and to

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abide with them. As in Christ all fulness dwells, so believers are complete in him, and of his fulness they receive grace for grace—grace answerable to their cases, and equal to their necessities.

All his government is managed in reference to the good of the church. He has made the world by his power; but the church he has purchased with his blood. He therefore has a peculiar concern for her, in distinction from the world; and, in subservience to her interest, he directs all the affairs of his general dominion. He has promised, that he will finally make her victorious over all her enemies; and we may be assured, that all the revolutions of kingdoms, and all the dispensations of Providence will, under his direction, conduce to the fulfilment of this promise.

The church is instituted to train up rational beings in knowledge and holiness, that they may become meet for everlasting felicity in the future world. *This* must, then, be the most important branch of Christ's government; and to *this* all the other parts must be subservient. If the happiness, of men in another state is of more value than all temporal glory and riches; if that happiness depends on moral qualifications; and if to form men to these qualifications is the great purpose for which the church was instituted and endowed; then it cannot be doubted, but that the Redeemer continually exercises his supreme dominion in reference to her edification and safety.

This thought should give us much consolation in the darkest periods of the church.

There are times, when from the approach of external dangers, or from the increase of internal corruptions, her state appears critical and tending to ruin. But Christ will not forget his promise; "I the Lord do keep her, and lest any hurt her, I will keep her night and day." He may visit her transgressions with a rod; but his loving kindness he will not take from her, nor suffer his faithfulness to fail. He knows how

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to overrule the most threatening appearances for the advancement of her purity, and the establishment of her safety. The time is coming, when she will arise and shine, and her glory will spread through the earth; And those circumstances, which in human view look most unfavorable, may, under the direction of divine wisdom, contribute to the introduction of such a happy period.

We see how criminal and dangerous it is to oppose the interest of the church.

As the church is Christ's body, which he nourishes and defends, and for which he is made head over all things, they who persecute this, wound him in a most tender part! They who cause divisions in this, make a schism or rent in his body: They who form parties in opposition to each other, and still call themselves members of Christ, treat the one Saviour, as if he were divided into as many parts, as there are sects which assume his name! They who, by corrupt doctrines and examples, draw tender minds away from the truth as it is in Jesus, and throw stumbling blocks before the lame and the weak, are destroying those for whom Christ died; and by thus sinning against the brethren, they sin against Christ: They who call Christ their Lord, and yet serve divers lusts and pleasures, are enemies to his cross, and their end will be destruction.

If the church is Christ's body, let us honor it; study to preserve unity in it; labor for its edification and comfort; and, as fellow members of the same body, exercise for each other the same care as for ourselves.

How safe and happy are they, who are the true members of Christ's body, being vitally united to him by faith! They are of that select and distinguished member, for whom he is made head over all things, and to whom all things under his direction, are working for good.

If Christ is the head of the body, and filleth all in all, let us daily look to him for counsel, comfort and sup-

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port; and, in the continual exercise of faith, derive from him all needed supplies of grace.

If we profess to be members of his body, let us move under his influence and in compliance with his directions. Let us honor and reverence our head, and never presumptuously lift up ourselves against it. And God grant, that, speaking the truth in love, we may grow up in all things into Christ our head, and may make increase, as his body, to the edifying of ourselves in love.



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# SERMON X.

## *The Depravity of Human Nature.*

EPHESIANS ii. 1, 2, 3.

*And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past, ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience; among whom also we all had our conversation in times past, in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath even as others.*

IF you will carefully attend to this epistle, you will find that the thoughts expressed in it are closely connected, and one thought leads to another through the whole. Paul, both in his preaching and writing, was an accurate reasoner, not an incoherent declaimer. The thoughts in the text and the words following, arise out of those which immediately precede. He had just described the glorious resurrection, exaltation and dominion of Jesus Christ, which, he tells the Ephesian believers, were pledges and earnests of their final glorification in heaven. "Now," says he, "as God has raised up Christ your head, and set him at his own right hand; so he has quickened you, who once were dead in your sins, and raised you up with Christ, and made you sit together in heavenly places in him. That the glorious hope, the blessed inheritance, and

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the happy resurrection, of which I have spoken, will be your portion, you may learn from that, which God has already done for you. He has quickened you who were dead in your sins; he has made you meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints; he has raised up your head, Christ Jesus, and has placed him, and in him has placed your nature, already in heaven. And if the head is raised, the members will follow. If you believe that Jesus is risen, you must believe, that them who sleep in Jesus, God will bring with him; for he is the first fruits of them who sleep, and because he lives, they will live also."

That the Ephesians might have the more admiring sentiments of the power and grace of God in quickening them to a spiritual life, and raising them to a hope of the heavenly inheritance, he leads them to the contemplation of that dismal state of corruption and guilt, in which the gospel found them. A description of that state is contained in the words which I have read. The several expressions, by which he describes their past condition, I shall now explain and illustrate. And let us remember that the description is applicable to other sinners, as well as to those ancient Gentiles. This general application the Apostle teaches us to make.

I. He expresses their state in more general terms. "They were dead in trespasses and sins." What is here said of *them*, is elsewhere said of *all* under the power of sin: "They are dead, while they live." Hence conversion is called "a rising from the dead;" and "a passing from death to life." These expressions, however, being figurative, must be understood with proper qualifications.

Sinners possess the natural faculties of men; and in their worldly affairs they often exercise such prudence and activity, that our Saviour once observed, "the children of this world are, in their generation, wiser than the children of light." Their deadness consists,

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not in the want, but in the perversion of the intellectual powers: And their recovery consists, not in the creation of new faculties, but in the holy direction of the faculties which they have. They are, then, to be addressed as rational beings; truth is to be placed before them; arguments are to be proposed to them; the terrors of the law are to be applied for their awakening; and the invitations of the gospel are to be urged for their encouragement. "Come, and let us *reason* together," says the Almighty to a wicked and degenerate people. "Paul," in the presence of Felix, "*reasoned* of righteousness, temperance and a future judgment." His design in his preaching was, "to open men's eyes, and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God."

We are not from this description to infer that sinners, in a state of unregeneracy, are on account of their deadness excusable for continuing in that state; for as the state itself is criminal, continuance in it is continued and increasing criminality.

Nor are we from the use of such metaphors to conclude, that sinners under the gospel can do nothing to their conversion, more than the dead to their resurrection; and that therefore it is improper and absurd to exhort them to repentance; for with such exhortations the scripture every where abounds.

It is often asked, whether the unregenerate can do any thing of themselves, which has a tendency to their conversion? But the answer is, They who enjoy the gospel are not left to themselves. If you suppose a man under the power of vicious inclinations, and at the same time destitute of all means of religious knowledge, and without any influence from the spirit of God, you then have the idea of a sinner properly left to himself. But this is not your case. You have the gospel in your hands; and it is daily proclaimed in your hearing. There is an agency of the divine Spirit attending it; and you have been, and, we hope, still are

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in some degree the subjects of this agency. With these advantages, there is something which you may do. Confound not your case with that of uninstructed Heathens; for God has made your case different from theirs. In respect of the awakening and convincing motions of the Spirit, as well as in regard of external means, God has been beforehand with you. He has granted them before you sought them. He has knocked at your door, before you invited him to come in. He still stretches out his hand to the disobedient and gainsaying. When the gospel is called a ministration of the Spirit, and the Spirit is said to be ministered to men in the hearing of faith—when Christ is said to stand at their door and knock, that they may hear and open to him—when the Spirit is said to strive with the wicked—when God promises that he will pour out his spirit on the offspring of his people—when sinners are reproved for having always resisted the Holy Ghost; and when they who oppose the gospel, are said to do despite to the spirit of grace; it is plainly supposed and implied that there is an operation of the Spirit, which attends the publication of the gospel, and which is commonly afforded to them who hear the word of salvation; and that, in consequence of this, they are capable of such an attendance on the instituted means of religion, as may hopefully issue in their real conversion.

It is sometimes asked, whether any thing done by an unregenerate person can be acceptable to God? The answer depends on the meaning of the word *acceptable*. If hereby is intended that which intitles to a future reward, the answer must certainly be in the negative. But if by this is meant that which, by the gracious appointment of God, may be useful in order to obtain the renewing influences of the divine Spirit; doubtless, in this sense, something may be done which is acceptable.

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But is not every thing, done by the unregenerate, wholly sinful and abominable in the sight of God? In answer to this inquiry, let it be observed, that the unregenerate have the natural principles of hope and fear —these principles, in awakened sinners, are put in motion by the application of the divine word and the operations of the holy Spirit. Now those prayers for mercy, those watchings against sin, those reformations of life, and that attendance on means, to which sinners are excited by the influence of the word and Spirit of God, cannot be called *wholly* sinful, or *perfectly* abominable in his sight. God does not abominate the work of his own Spirit.

There is certainly, then, more hope of their obtaining salvation in the use, than in the neglect of appointed means. Hence they are called upon to "awake and arise from the dead"—"to repent and turn to God"—"to make them a new heart, and a new spirit."

Farther: From the metaphor used in the text we are not to conclude, that all sinners are alike; for though all are in a sense dead, yet some are under a greater death than others. The metaphor is usually in scripture applied to sinners of the most vicious character. When we speak of human nature, as *totally* depraved, we mean only a total destitution of real holiness; not the highest possible degree of vitiosity. Native depravity may doubtless be increased by positive habits. In order to denominate one a sinner, it is not necessary that he should be as bad as possible. We are not to conclude ourselves holy and regenerate merely because we cannot find *every* vicious disposition operating in us to the greatest imaginable degree. Though natural death does not, yet spiritual death does, admit of degrees. Evil men wax worse and worse; add sin to sin, and treasure up wrath against the day of wrath.

But though we may not overstrain this metaphor, yet there is an undoubted propriety in the application

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which the Apostle makes of it. The moral state of wicked men much resembles a state of natural death.

They may be said to be dead, in respect of their *stupidity*. We read of some, who are past feeling—whose conscience is seared—who have eyes which see not, and ears which hear not, and a heart which is waxed gross. This is, in a high degree, the case of some sinners, and more or less the case of all, until they are awakened by the grace of God. Look around; how easy and secure do multitudes appear! How unaffected with the most important concerns! How unmoved at the most awful threatenings! How indifferent about the consequences of their sins! Their hearts are like a mortified limb, which feels no pain under the scarifying knife.

They are represented as wanting *spiritual senses*—they savor the things of the world; not the things which are of God. They, indeed, love the effects of God's goodness to them; but they delight not in his character, as a holy, just and faithful Being. They desire heaven, under the general notion of a very happy place; but desire not that which makes heaven a happy place, the presence of the holy God, the society of holy beings, and employment in holy services. They have not a proper relish for God's worship, ordinances and word. They may, indeed, be pleased with them in some respects. We read of a wicked people, who took delight in approaching to God, and to whom God's word was as a lovely song of one that had a pleasant voice, and could play well on an instrument. They may feel a natural pleasure in certain mechanical emotions of the passions excited by objects presented to the sight, or by sounds which strike the ear; as the artificial tears from the image of the Virgin Mary will melt down an assembly of Catholics; or as a concert of musical instruments will enrapture the hearers: But they relish not the word and ordinances of God, considered as means of holiness, and as designed to con-

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vince them of their sins, and bring them to repentance. They long not for the pure milk of divine ordinances, as the means of spiritual nutrition and increase. If the word dispensed comes home to their conscience, they are offended. They lose the music of the pleasant song, and talk against it by the walls, and in the doors of their houses.

They resemble the dead in the want of *vital warmth*. If they have any fervor in religion, it is about the forms and externals of it, or about some favorite sentiments, which they find well adapted to soothe their consciences; not about those things in which the power of religion consists. Here they are formal and indifferent.

The motions of their souls are not toward heaven, but toward earth. They mind the things of the flesh; not the things of the spirit.

As death deforms the body; so sin destroys the beauty of the soul. It darkens the reason, perverts the judgment, and disorders the affections. Thus to be carnally minded is death.

Sinners may be denominated as dead, as they are worthy of, and exposed to eternal punishment. This is in scripture often called death, because it is the separation of the soul from God and heaven, from happiness and hope, from all good, and unto all evil. This is a death, which awaits the impenitent. "He who believeth not is condemned already—the wrath of God abideth on him."—There is no deliverance, but by faith in Jesus Christ. The opportunity for this deliverance is short and precarious. Hence the impenitent may be called *dead men*, in regard of their daily exposedness to everlasting death. I proceed to observe,

II. The Apostle describes these sinners of the Gentiles, as having "walked according to the course of this world." They, like dead carcasses, swam down the stream of common custom, and were carried away with the general current of vice and corruption.

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There is in ungodly men a general disposition to follow the way of the world. Hence these cautions and exhortations to professing christians; "Be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind."—"Walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind; but put off the old man, and put on the new man."—"Keep yourselves from this untoward generation."—"Be blameless and harmless, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation."

Most men have a general idea, that there is such a thing as religion, and that it is a matter of some importance to the human race. So obvious is this sentiment, that few can wholly suppress it, or reason themselves out of it. But what religion is, and wherein it consists, there are many who seldom inquire; and perhaps never examine with any degree of attention. The opinions, which are most prevalent, they implicitly adopt; and join themselves to this or that profession, or to none at all, because others around them do so. Many, no doubt, believe christianity in the same implicit manner, in which the Ephesians worshipped *Diana* "the great goddess, whom all Asia and the world worshipped." They are of this, or that denomination, rather than another not because their own inquiry decides in its favor, but only because the way of the world gives it the preference. Such implicit believers, having no fixed principles of their own, are easily carried about by every new wind of doctrine that springs up. Such opinions as flatter their ungodly lusts, or pacify their guilty consciences, they warmly embrace. That scheme of doctrine, which will make converts without exacting reformation, and will give assurance without putting them to much labor, they highly approve. The path which will lead men to heaven with little selfdenial, they readily pursue.

There are many, who blindly follow the examples of the world. Whether such a practice is right or



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wrong, they take little pains to examine. It is enough, that they see many who adopt it. If their conscience condemns it, still they will rather retain it, than dissent from the fashionable world. They have not fortitude to withstand the ridicule of profane wits. They had rather incur the censure of their own minds, and the displeasure of their God, than stand distinguished by a singularity in virtue. It is a noble resolution, which, in times of general corruption, will say, "Depart from me, ye evil doers, for I will keep the commandments of my God."—"If it seem evil to you to serve the Lord, choose ye, this day, whom ye will serve: But, as for me, I will serve the Lord."

III. The Apostle represents these Ephesians, in their Heathen state, as walking "according to the prince of the power of the air, the Spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience."

The scripture teaches us, that God, before he made man, created a superior order of intelligences, whom he placed in a state of probation; and that, of this order a vast number, revolting from his government, were thrust out of heaven, their ancient habitation; and are now reserved in chains, under darkness, to the judgment of the great day, when they will receive the full measure of the punishment due to their rebellion, being cast into the place prepared for that purpose. The opinion of Jews and Heathens, that evil spirits inhabited the lower regions of our atmosphere, seems to be favored by the Apostle, who calls the devil "the prince of the power of the air"—and evil spirits "the rulers of the darkness of this world." And by our Saviour, who calls them "the power of darkness."

These evil spirits are said "to work in the children of disobedience"—"to enter into them"—"fill their hearts"—"lead them captive at their will." And the wickedness which prevails in the world is ascribed to them, in such terms as import, that they have much influence in its existence and continuance. Wicked

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men are said to be "of the devil." They are called "his children." The promoters of error and vice are denominated "the ministers of Satan." And the place where wickedness and corruption abound is marked as "Satan's seat."

These spirits often *tempt* the godly; but in the children of disobedience they are said to *enter*, to *dwell*, to *work*, to exercise an *energy*, an inwrought power; for these yield themselves to their influence.

The number of evil spirits is very great; but there is one distinguished from the rest, and called the devil, Satan, the prince of devils, the prince of the power of the air. The others are called his angels and ministers.

These Ephesians, before the gospel came among them, "walked according to the prince of darkness." They doubtless, like other Heathens, not only obeyed his suggestions and did his works, but paid worship and did sacrifice at his alter. The Heathen world is represented as the kingdom of Satan; and, on account of the influence which he had in it, and the homage which he received from it, he is called the *god* of it. That direction of the Apostle, concerning an excommunicated person, "that he should be delivered unto Satan," probably intends, that he should be cast out of Christ's church into the world, which is the kingdom of Satan; or should be considered as a Heathen, one who had revolted from Christ, and joined himself again to the kingdom of darkness.

The influence of Satan, though greatly diminished where the gospel comes, yet is not wholly extinguished. He still works in the ungodly; and even the saints he desires to have, that he may sift them as wheat —may agitate and vex them with his temptations. In what manner he works in the minds of men, it is difficult for us to say; but the medium of his access seems to be their passions and lusts, which he inflames by suggesting evil thoughts, or by painting images on the

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fancy. It was by the avarice of Judas, and of Ananias, that he entered into them and filled their hearts. They who have pleasure in unrighteousness, are the persons to whom he comes with all deceivableness of unrighteousness, and in whom he works strong delusions. They who, departing from the right way, give heed to seducing spirits—they who, laying aside the plain instructions of scripture, yield themselves up to the power of a heated imagination, and to the conduct of deceitful workers, are the persons to whom Satan transforms himself into an angel of light. That we may secure ourselves, then, from his subtle, influence, we must mortify our lusts, rule our passions, restrain the wild sallies of fancy, and follow the plain dictates of divine revelation. Our mother Eve was not drawn into disobedience, until she began to listen to the devil's perverse interpretation of God's command, and to imagine there might be in it some hidden sense, which her own sagacity had not discovered. The Apostle expresses his concern for the Corinthians, "lest, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so their minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

IV. The Apostle says, "We all in time past, had our conversation among the children of disobedience, in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind."

The wickedness of sinners consists, not merely in their evil works, but especially in the corrupt dispositions which prompt them to those works.—These dispositions are of two sorts; "the *lusts* of the *flesh*; and the *desires* of the *flesh* and of the *mind*;" or of the *fleshly mind*—the mind sunk into a sensual frame, and devoted to carnal interests.

The lusts of the *flesh*, properly so called, are the vices of sensuality, which have their origin immediately from the flesh; such as intemperance, uncleanness, debauchery and excess of riot. The desires of the

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fleshly *mind* are the lusts which arise from the corruption of the mind in its connexion with flesh; such as pride, malice, envy, wrath, hatred, ambition and covetousness. These two sorts of sins the Apostle distinguishes in his epistle to Titus. "We once served divers lusts and pleasures—and we lived in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another."

The Apostle says, "We *all* had our conversation in the lusts of the flesh."

Every unrenewed person is under the power of a carnal mind. No man, indeed, lives in the indulgence of *every* lust; for some lusts are inconsistent with others; and that which predominates will naturally exclude those which oppose the gratification of itself. Covetousness makes some men temperate; and pride makes others liberal. The denial of particular lusts is not a conclusive evidence of a sanctified heart. If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, all things are become new." Though no man indulges every vice, yet every unregenerate man obeys the carnal mind in some way or other; and whoever is under the dominion of any ungodly lust, vicious habit, or evil passion, is in a state of unregeneracy.

V. The Apostle adds, "We were by nature children of wrath, even as others." The words are parallel to those in the 5th chapter; "No unclean person or covetous man, who is an idolator, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.—Let not uncleanness or covetousness be once named among you, for because of these things, cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience."

The Apostle here expressly warns us, that the indulgence of carnal lusts and passions brings on men the wrath of God. A mind sunk into carnality is incapable of a rational felicity; it is miserable in itself, and from its own corruption and perverseness.

Man is by the Author of his nature endued with reason, as the superior, presiding faculty. If this is sub-

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jected to the lusts and passions, the order of nature is inverted, the law of creation violated, and the Creator dishonored and offended.

Let no man plead, that by fulfilling the lusts of the flesh and of the mind, he follows nature. The Apostle teaches us, that our nature is corrupted; and therefore our business is not to obey its propensities, but to rectify its disorders. We are, by nature, children of disobedience and of wrath.—We come on the stage of the world, with such an innate depravity, as draws us into evil and exposes us to misery. Now if our nature is depraved and the mind become carnal, then mere propensity and blind inclination cannot be a rule to guide our conduct. Reason must preside over the passions; and that it may preside with equity, it must take its directions from the light which God has given in the gospel. The work of renovation restores reason to its place, and brings the flesh under its dominion.

By the word *nature*, in our text, some understand *habit*; and suppose the Apostle to mean, "that by custom and practice we are become children of wrath, having fulfilled the desires of the flesh." But if we admit, that by nature the Apostle intends habit, still the same conclusion will follow, that human nature is in a state of depravity; for he says, "We *all* had our conversation in the lusts of the flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and mind, and were children of wrath." If this is the character of *all* men, until they are renewed by grace, we must suppose, that some moral disorder has taken place in our nature; otherwise we cannot account for this universal prevalence of wickedness. If there were in the mind no evil bias, but all were inclined rather to virtue, than to vice, why are there not some—a few at least—who escape these evil habits, and obtain salvation without a renewal of their nature? Whatever be the sense of this particular word, the general doctrine is the same, that all have

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sinned; and all need renovation by the Spirit, and pardon through the blood of Jesus Christ.

We see, from the Apostle's description, what is the awful condition of impenitent sinners. They are dead in their sins, and condemned to eternal death. They follow the corrupt ways of a guilty world;—they are led captive by Satan;—they are slaves to the lusts of the flesh and the passions of the mind;—they are under the wrath of a holy God. O sinners can you believe that this is your condition, and yet remain in thoughtless security?—Awake: Flee from the wrath to come; lay hold on the hope, which the gospel sets before you.

Some perhaps, will say, "This description agreed well to the character and condition of those ancient Heathens, but it will not apply to us, who enjoy the gospel, for we have never run to such excesses in vice as they had."

Be it so: Yet remember, that this gospel is the gift of God, and for it you are accountable. If you have not, like them, abandoned yourselves to the grossest forms of vice; it is because you have been placed under superior light, and enjoyed a happier education. Bless God who has made you to differ; and consider also, that, under your circumstances, less degrees of vice may involve you in equal guilt with them. If you have that knowledge of God and religion—those motives and encouragements to virtue—those discoveries of the wrath of God against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men—those hopes of pardon and grace through a Saviour, which they never had, then the excuses which might be pleaded for them, cannot be admitted for you. And if they were children of wrath, because they walked according to the course of this world, indulging the lusts of the flesh and the desires of the mind, how much more are you children of wrath, while you walk like them.

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Remember too, that though you may not have indulged *all* the lusts and vices, which some others have done, yet, if you are children of disobedience, you can no more be saved without renovation of heart and repentance of sin, than they can.—And repentance, in its general nature, must be the same in you, as in them; even a change of heart from the love of sin, to the love of God's commands. If you think this repentance necessary for some gross sinners, know, it is as necessary for you, as for them.—If you believe, that great sinners are children of wrath, know, that all sinners are such. And such are you, while the love of sin reigns in your hearts, although, by the restraints of God's Providence and grace, you have been kept back from some presumptuous sins. Think seriously on your guilt and danger, and apply to God, who is rich in mercy, that he would quicken you together with Christ, and raise you up, and make you to sit together with him in heavenly places: For by grace ye are saved.

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# SERMON XI.

## *Believers quickened, raised and exalted with Christ.*

EPHESIANS ii. 4, 5, 6, 7.

*But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us by Jesus Christ.*

IN the preceding verses, our Apostle describes the deplorable state in which the gospel found the Ephesians and other Gentile nations, when it first came among them.

In the words now read we shall contemplate, the happy change which the gospel made in them—the rich mercy of God in effecting this change—and the General purpose of God's particular mercy to them.

I. We will consider the happy change which the gospel made in the Ephesians—a change not peculiar to them, but common to all sincere believers. "He hath quickened us, raised us up, and made us sit together with Christ.

1. He hath *quickened* us, or made us *alive* with Christ, in opposition to the state before described, when we were *dead* in trespasses and sins.



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True Christians are *alive*, as they have spiritual *senses* and *appetites*.

The *eyes* of their *understanding* are *enlightened* to *discern* the things of the spirit of God in their truth and importance. They *look* at things future and unseen, and regard them as real and present.

The heart of *stone* is changed into a *tender* and *sensible* heart. They can now be *pierced* with the conviction, and *pained* with the burden of sin; they *feel* their weakness and need of grace to help. They *tremble* at God's word, and are *afraid* of his judgments. They are *watchful* against temptations, and when sin surprises them, their hearts *smite* them with godly sorrow.

They *savor* the things which are of God. Having *tasted* that he is gracious, they *hunger* and *thirst* after fresh supplies of his grace, and *desire* the sincere milk of his word, that they may grow thereby.

They are *fervent* in spirit, serving the Lord—zealous to repent, and to maintain good works—careful to know, and active to do God's will—solicitous to secure his favor, and stand approved in his sight.

They have spiritual *motions*. The divine principle within them directs their thoughts toward God, and their course toward heaven. They walk with God in newness of life—they run the way of his commandments. Waiting on the Lord, they renew their strength, mount up with wings as eagles; they run and are not weary; they walk and faint not.

They have spiritual *pleasures*, which once they were unacquainted with—pleasures resulting from a sense of God's favor—from a consciousness of sincerity—from a hope of immortality—from a victory over sin—from communion with God—and from anticipations of glory.

They possess spiritual *powers*. Strengthened with might by the spirit in the inner man, they can bear afflictions with patience—meet dangers with fortitude—

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perform duty with cheerfulness—and encounter temptations with success.

They *grow* in grace. Sensible of the imperfection of all their attainments, they desire to abound more and more in knowledge, faith, love, and every good work, and to reach the stature of perfect men in Christ.

The Apostle says, "We are quickened *together with Christ.*"

Our spiritual life comes *through him.* "He bare our sins, that we, being dead to sin, should live to righteousness." It is through his atonement and intercession, that God grants the external means of life, and his quickening Spirit to attend them. "We are saved by the renewing of the Holy Ghost, which God has shed on us through Christ."

The spiritual life in believers is *conformed to Christ.* They have the same mind which was in him. His life is manifested in them. Hence he is said to be *formed in them,* and they are said to grow up in all things *into him.*

2. God hath *raised us up* together with Christ.

On the certainty of his resurrection depends the credit of the gospel. "If he be not risen, our preaching is in vain, and your faith is also vain." This being the foundation of the christian faith, God took care that it should be firmly established by the circumstances of the fact—by the testimony of angels and men—of friends and enemies—by numerous miracles—and by the fulfilment of divers predictions of the ancient prophets and of the Saviour himself. Hence the Apostle says, "He was declared to be the Son of God *with power,* by his resurrection from the dead.

God is said to have raised up believers *with him.* The *past* time is used for the *future* to express the certainty of the event.

His resurrection is the *proof* and the *pattern* of theirs.

It is the *proof* of theirs. "Now is Christ risen and become the first fruits of them that slept." The first

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fruits are the pledge of the harvest. "He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the first born from the dead." If the head is raised, the members united to it will rise also. "If we believe, that Jesus died and rose again, even so them that sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him." Christ's resurrection shews our resurrection to be possible, and it confirms the truth of the gospel, which declares the event to be certain. "God has begotten us to a lively hope by the resurrection of Christ." On the ground of this assurance, believers are said to be raised with him.

His resurrection is the *pattern* of theirs. "We look for a SAVIOUR from heaven, who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like to his glorious body." Being planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall spring up also in the likeness of his resurrection." The Apostle adds,

3. God hath made us *sit together* in heavenly places in Christ.

Christ's entrance into heaven, is a full proof of the final salvation of believers. He as their friend and patron is gone to prepare a place for them; to take possession of the purchased inheritance and keep it in reserve until their arrival. They are said to sit with him in heaven, because he sits there for them, to take care of their interest, and in due time will bring them to sit where he is. "Their life is hid with Christ in God, and when Christ shall appear, they will appear with him in glory." Their happiness will greatly consist in being with him. This was his prayer for his disciples; "Father, I will that they whom thou hast given me, may be with me where I am, and behold my glory." This was St. Paul's consolation in his persecutions; "If we be dead with him, we shall also live with him; if we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him." This was his joy in the prospect of death: "We are confident and willing to be absent from the body, and present with the Lord."

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How vast is the change produced in those who have received the gospel with faith and love!—Once dead in their sins, children of wrath, condemned to eternal punishment, they are now quickened with Christ, raised up and made to sit with him in heavenly places. They have passed from death to life—from guilt to pardon—from enmity to peace with God; and of the children of wrath they are become heirs of glory.

Our text leads us,

II. To contemplate the *mercy* of God in this great change. "God who is rich in mercy for his great love hath quickened us with Christ. By grace are ye saved."

*Mercy* is a particular branch of goodness, which is a disposition to communicate happiness. Goodness regards its objects as capable of happiness. Mercy respects them as beings in a state of misery or danger; and it operates variously, according to their circumstances, by averting, suspending, moderating, or preventing their misery, or overruling it to their benefit.

The mercy of God is in scripture illustrated by that compassion which we feel in the view of others in distress. He condescends to speak after the manner of men, and to represent himself as *grieved* and even *afflicted* in our afflictions, and as feeling his *heart turned*, and his *bowels moved*, when he inflicts on us his holy corrections. Such expressions are used, not to signify that there is really any commotion in the divine mind, but to give us a more familiar, as well as more exalted idea of the divine mercy.

"God is *rich* in mercy."

His mercies are rich *in extent*. They are not confined to us: They fill the earth—they are great unto the heavens—they spread over all his works.

They are rich in *number*. "How precious are God's thoughts toward us! How great is the sum of them! If we would count them, they are more than the sand."

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They are rich in respect of *constancy*. They flow in an uninterrupted stream. They endure continually. We are loaded with them daily. When we lie down, and when we awake, we are still with God.

They are rich in *variety*. By them we are relieved in trouble, supplied in want, protected in danger, comforted in sorrow, guided in doubt, secured in temptation, strengthened in weakness and preserved to salvation.

They are rich in *value*. "God is our sun and shield, he gives grace and glory, and no good thing will he withhold from them who walk uprightly."

The Apostle, having asserted in general terms, that God is rich in mercy, selects a particular instance to illustrate the doctrine. "For the great love, wherewith he loved us, when we were dead in sin, he hath quickened us with Christ." And greater love cannot be imagined.

He *first* loved us. His love to us originated with himself. "He saved and called us, not according to our works, for we were dead in sins, but according to his own purpose and grace." "It was in his own selfmoving mercy, that he gave his Son to be a propitiation for us—that he blessed the world with the light of revelation—that he assigned us a place within this glorious light—that he hath shined into any of our hearts and given the light of the knowledge of his glory in the face of his Son.

His love appears the greater, because it is exercised toward us, *through Jesus Christ*. "He that delivered up his Son for us, how shall he not with him also, freely give us all things?"

His love shines still brighter, when we consider what a Being he is.

He is infinitely *above us*. "He humbles himself to behold the things which are in heaven;" much more to regard the things which are on earth. We tread on worms and insects without concern, for we think

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them too impotent to take revenge, and too contemptible to deserve regard. Does God treat us with this indifference? The stars are not clean in his sight: How much less man who is a worm?"—"Yet he visits us every moment."

He is *selfsufficient*. His happiness is in himself. "If we sin, what do we to him? And if we are righteous, what receiveth he at our hands?" His mercy is wholly disinterested. It is what we did not deserve, and cannot remunerate. Our impotence cannot give, nor can his fulness receive a recompense.

"He is not worshipped by men's hands, as if he needed any thing." All creation was his work, and is at his command. If this were not sufficient for his purpose, he, who has the residue of the Spirit, can call into existence other systems to display his goodness, wisdom and power. There is reason to believe, that men make but a small part of the intelligent universe. Certainly there are orders far more noble than we; and probably they are far more numerous. How wonderful it is, that amidst the immensity of God's works, our race is so mercifully remembered!

His mercy appears more rich and glorious, when we contemplate it in connexion with his *purity*. His holiness abhors sin, and yet his mercy can forgive it. Our readiness to forgive is often an indifference to sin, rather than a love of mercy. But God's mercy to sinners is not at all restrained by his hatred of their sins. He would not that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance; and them who repent he abundantly pardons.

The gospel gives us the most exalted conceptions of God's character. That he is good and merciful is a dictate of reason: But that *great love* wherewith he loved us is discovered only by the revelation of Christ. The light of nature, whatever hints it may be supposed to give us concerning the character of God, could never teach us that he will be merciful to *sinners*—

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merciful to *us*—merciful in *this* or *that* particular *way*; for his mercy is directed by wisdom; and we cannot determine how, and to whom it will be exercised, because without information from him, we cannot judge what his wisdom will see to be best. To revelation therefore we are wholly indebted for our assurance, that God will pardon sin on repentance, give his Spirit to them who ask it, and bestow eternal life on them who patiently continue in well doing.

III. We are, lastly, to consider the *general* purpose of God's *particular* mercy to these Ephesians. "God quickened them— that *in the ages to come* he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness to *them* by Jesus Christ." "For this cause also Paul obtained mercy, that in him first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering for a pattern to them who should afterward believe."

God's ways are not as ours. It is by a labored process that we accomplish a single purpose: He by the same means brings about many purposes. In the exercises of his mercy toward particular sinners he designs not *their* benefit *only*, but that of others also. His mercy in reclaiming one transgressor may operate to the salvation of thousands in ages to come. The conversion of this sinner not only encourages others to seek God's mercy, but also places this person in a situation for more extensive usefulness. He who before destroyed, now promotes much good. What a vast and lasting benefit to the world was the conversion of the Apostle Paul? He obtained mercy, not for his own sake only, but rather that he might stand an encouraging pattern of divine grace, and might go and preach among the nations the unsearchable riches of Christ. Paul calls himself the chief of sinners. Some not so guilty as he, may have perished in their sins. Is God partial then in bestowing his grace? No; but he is sovereign. And may he not do what he will with his own? They who perish have abused and for-

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felted his grace. Is he unjust in withdrawing it? What if some more criminal than these are recovered by abundant grace? Is there unrighteousness with God? By no means: For the recovery of these is designed for the benefit of many, and is a prejudice to none. Paul, who had been a great sinner, was reclaimed by a divine voice and supernatural light from heaven. Why was not the same favor vouchsafed to many others, who had done less than he to injure Christ's cause? The answer is; God had done much for them: They had no ground of complaint. But he reclaimed this offender, because he was a fit instrument to carry into effect the grand purposes of grace, in behalf of fallen men. "He was a chosen vessel to bear Christ's name before the Gentiles and kings, and the children of Israel." His capacity, education and circumstances, rendered him a proper person to be employed in spreading the gospel. And therefore, God's special mercy to him in his conversion, was general goodness to mankind.

The gospel dispensation, in which we are more immediately concerned, was intended to serve some useful purposes among other intelligences. Christ is made head over all things in heaven, as well as in earth. The angels desire to look into the marvellous scheme of man's redemption. The unsearchable riches of Christ are preached to men, not only to make them understand the mystery, which from the beginning has been hidden in God, but also that unto principalities and powers, in heavenly places, might be known by the church, the manifold wisdom of God.

And not only God's gracious dispensation to fallen men, but also his righteous severity toward irreclaimable offenders, is designed for extensive beneficial influence. His providential chastenings are intended for the warning of beholders, as well as for the reformation of the sufferers. His judgments are sent abroad, that the inhabitants of the world may learn righteousness. And even the final punishment of the impenitent may



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probably promote some of the benevolent ends of God's moral government, and be forever of use to other intelligent beings.

We are not to imagine, that God will injure *one* for the greater good of *another*, or of a *number*. To inflict undeserved punishment, would be injustice to the *involuntary* sufferers, whatever benefit might result to others. And there is no unrighteousness with God. But we may suppose, that his wisdom and goodness will make the just punishment of particular offenders, redound to the greater and more extensive happiness of his virtuous subjects. We know not but the most rigorous acts of his justice may, in some view or other, be acts of mercy and goodness.

How should we be filled with admiration of that Being, whose particular favors are general kindnesses; whose righteous judgments are acts of goodness; and who in the exercises of his justice makes mercy triumphant?

What abundant cause of gratitude have we, for the discoveries of divine grace, made to us in the gospel? What else could save the sinner, roused to an apprehension of his own guilt and of God's justice, from running into distraction and despair? Nature gives him no more reason to conclude, that God will pardon him on future repentance, than that he will punish him for past disobedience. And be sure, when he finds his repentance imperfect, his resolutions unstable, his offences again repeated, and his strength unequal to the conquest of his vicious habits, what positive hope can nature give him, that God will assist him by his grace or pardon him by his mercy? To the awakened sinner the gospel comes as tidings of great joy.

Let believers adore the riches of God's grace. Some in the high road to destruction have been mercifully arrested and reclaimed. These should love much. And even they who have earlier found mercy in the diligent use of means, must acknowledge, that by the grace of God they are what they are.

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Every unreclaimed sinner must be utterly inexcuseable; for he has received the grace of God in vain.

Let the awakened be encouraged to seek salvation. Draw hope from the examples of God's mercy to others; improve every good beginning in yourselves; let every conviction excite you to seek more grace; wait upon God, and hope in his mercy, that the work begun in you will be performed to the day of Christ.

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# SERMON XII.

## *Salvation, not by Works, but by Grace through Faith.*

EPHESIANS ii. 8, 9, 10.

*For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God: Not of works lest any man should boast; for we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained, that we should walk in them.*

THE Apostle here asserts, in general terms, that *our salvation is of grace.* This is an obvious conclusion from the doctrine already proposed and proved. If, when we were dead in sins, God hath quickened us and raised us up with Christ, our salvation can be only in a way of grace; for they who are dead, surely can do nothing which should deserve so mighty an interposition for their recovery.

In what sense our salvation is of grace the Apostle next explains. *It is not of ourselves; it is the gift of God.* That which is a gift from God, without any right of demand on our part, is of grace. As the gospel finds us involved in guilt, slaves to the world, and children of wrath, we can pretend no claim to salvation: If we obtain it, we must be wholly indebted to divine mercy.

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This truth the Apostle farther illustrates by stating the *manner* in which we are saved. *We are saved by faith, not of works, lest any man should boast.*—The great condition of our salvation is *faith*; and this in its nature includes a reliance on the promise of God. And if salvation comes to us in consequence of our trusting in the promise which God has freely made, it comes only by grace. *Not of works, lest any man should boast.* Works, indeed, are necessary to salvation, for *God hath ordained that we shall walk in them*: But works give us no cause of boasting; for *we are created in Christ Jesus unto good works.*

We will here consider, How we are saved by faith—illustrate the influence that works have in our salvation—and shew that our salvation, though connected with works, is not the less of grace.

I. We will consider, How we are saved by, or through faith.

The salvation here intended the Apostle describes in the former chapter, and in the preceding verses of this. It is a deliverance from that ruined state into which the apostacy has plunged us, and a restoration to the divine favor with all its happy effects. It is begun here in the pardon of sin; it is completed in the enjoyment of the glorious riches of the heavenly inheritance, and in our sitting with Christ Jesus, who is now on the right hand of the throne of God.

The faith, through which we are saved, is expressed by "our *trusting*, and *believing* in Christ, after we have heard the word of truth and the gospel of our salvation." This faith is accompanied with a divine power which quickens and raises the soul, once dead in sin, to a spiritual life in conformity to the pattern of Christ. The fruit of faith is our being *sealed* and sanctified by the spirit of promise, and having in our souls an earnest of the future inheritance.

To form an idea of the nature of saving faith, we need only to consider, what we ourselves are, and what

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the gospel of Christ is. We are fallen, guilty creatures, children of disobedience, worthy of death. The gospel is a discovery of the way of salvation through Jesus Christ. Faith, therefore, is the consent and submission of the soul to this way of salvation. It is such a persuasion, that Jesus is the Son of God and the Saviour of men, and such a desire and expectation of salvation through him, as engages us to commit our souls to his care, and devote our lives to his service. The operation of faith, is to cast down our vain imaginations, to humble within us every high thing which exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and to bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

When we are said to be *saved* by faith, these two things are implied, That without faith we cannot be saved; and that all who have faith will be saved.

1. The expression implies, that without faith we cannot be saved.

This is the express doctrine of our divine Saviour. "If ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins. He that believeth not is condemned already. He shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him."

Faith is necessary in the *appointment* of God. As salvation is his gift, so he has stated the terms on which he will bestow it; and it is absurd to expect it on any other. Obstinate unbelief is a refusal of that plan of salvation, which his wisdom has fixed; and therefore a rejection of salvation itself.

Faith is necessary in the *nature* of the case; for when salvation is offered in a particular way, our refusing to accept it in this way, discovers such pride and perverseness of heart as render us incapable of enjoying it in any way.

Whatever knowledge we have of the doctrines of the gospel, if this knowledge is not accompanied with such a belief of those doctrines as gives them a humbling

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and purifying influence, it cannot save us. The knowledge of religion, if it is only speculative, is, like other speculative knowledge, useless and vain. If a man have all knowledge, and have not charity, he is nothing. Knowledge puffeth up; but charity edifieth.

Morality without faith will not save us. Morality, indeed, in the largest sense of the word, comprises the whole of religion—not only external good works, but a right temper of heart—not only the social virtues, justice, truth and honesty; but the graces of piety, love to God and faith in the Redeemer. But morality, taken in the vulgar sense for the external practice of virtue, and a freedom from gross impiety and wickedness, will not avail to our salvation. There must be purity of heart: And wherever this takes place, there will be a humble submission to, and reliance on that glorious Mediator, whom God has appointed and revealed. It is morally right, that we should regard all beings according to their known relations to us. And since Christ is exhibited to us in the character and relation, of a Redeemer, it is as reasonable and necessary, that we should regard and trust him in this relation, as that we should love and fear God. And it is as absurd for us, who enjoy the gospel, to pretend to virtue and piety without faith in Christ, as without reverence to the Deity.

2. The expression in the text implies, that all who have faith will be saved.

This the gospel expressly declares and promises in a variety of terms and phrases, which are so familiar to you, that I need not rehearse them.

When we read those passages which contain the promises of salvation to faith, we must always keep in mind, what the gospel means by faith—not a mere assent to, and profession of the truth; but such a belief as purifies the heart and governs the life. Salvation is promised to repentance and to obedience, as well as to faith; for these are all connected together, and each in-

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cludes the other. Faith supposes a conviction of sin and a sense of guilt; for without these we shall not feel our need of salvation, nor apply to Jesus for it. A soul humbled for sin, and seeking deliverance from it, will form resolutions against it, and purposes of new obedience. It is therefore absurd to say, that a believer will be saved by his faith, though he continues in the practice of sin; for the indulgence of sin is inconsistent with faith. A believer, through error of judgment, infirmity of nature, or force of temptation, may, contrary to his general disposition, be betrayed into particular miscarriages; but there cannot be allowed any customary disobedience to the gospel, where real faith exists, because that is contrary to the nature of faith.

Whoever believes with the faith, which the Apostle describes in this epistle, will be saved; for he has the promise of salvation—he is prepared for it—God has wrought him to it and already given him the earnest of it. Whatever his former life has been—whatever crimes he has committed—whatever guilt he has contracted, yet, on his thus submitting to the government, and relying on the power and grace of Christ, he is justified and accepted: His sins are forgiven, and his eternal happiness is secured. As his past sins, now sincerely repented of, do not exclude him from favor, so neither will his future imperfections nullify his pardon; for he lives by faith in the Son of God, and his faith operates to vigilance, selfexamination and renewed exercises of repentance. "There is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." I proceed,

II. To shew what place and influence works have in our salvation. The Apostle says, "We are not saved of works, lest any man should boast;" and yet adds, "We are created to good works, which God hath ordained that we should walk in them." He signifies, that works have some concern in our salvation; but not

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such a concern as gives cause of boasting. It will be proper for us to state this distinction.

1. We will consider, in what sense our salvation is not of works.

In general, it is not of works in such a sense, that any man can boast. Whatever place works have in the scheme of gospel religion, they give no pretence to boast that we are saved of ourselves.

(1.) We are not saved by works, considered as a fulfilment of the original law of nature. The law of God requires perfection, and condemns every man, who continues not in all things written therein. It is the nature of a law to demand a full compliance with itself. To suppose that it should point out duty, and yet allow a deviation from it, is a contradiction. As all have sinned, none can be saved on the foot of works, or of obedience to the law. All are already condemned for having violated this law, and no future works can reverse this condemnation.

In the question concerning the efficacy of good works to justification before God, it is necessary that we distinguish between good works in general, and those of fallen men in particular. If the question be, Whether an innocent being will be accepted on the foot of his innocence, and rewarded according to his righteousness, reason answers in the affirmative; and so answers the Apostle: "The man that doth the things contained in the law, shall live in them."—"To him that worketh," according to the tenor of the law, continuing in all things written in it, "The reward is not reckoned of grace, but of debt;" not as bestowed by the grace of God through a Mediator, but as due according to the tenor of the law, which promises life to obedience. If a man obeys God in all things, he needs no pardon, for he is exposed to no punishment; but may rely on the purity and justice of God to treat him according to his innocence. But if the question be, Whether the good



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works of such beings as *we* are, can claim a reward, the state of the question is altered; for we are already under condemnation for our evil works. On the foot of justice we can claim no more, than not to be punished beyond our deserts. We cannot demand a reward for the good we shall do; for justice condemns us already for the evil we have done. If our past transgressions are forgiven, and our future obedience rewarded, it must be merely on the foot of grace and bounty.

(2.) We are not saved by virtue of any works done before faith in Christ: For none of these are properly *good.* "We are God's workmanship created in Christ Jesus to good works." If it is in consequence of our being created of God in Christ, that we perform works really good, then we are not saved of works, in such a sense as gives cause for boasting. For evidently we cannot boast a claim to life on the foot of those works, which we perform only by the grace of God. We cannot say, we deserve heaven for those good things which we have done by God's working in us to will and to do, of his good pleasure. So the Apostle states the case in his epistle to Titus. "We were sometime foolish and disobedient, serving divers lusts and pleasures; but after the kindness and love of God toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we had done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost which he hath shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, that being justified by his grace we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." Believers are not saved by their works, for they become entitled to salvation by faith, before they perform works properly good. When that temper is found in them which leads to those works, they are accepted, even before there is a display of the temper in the works themselves. And if they should be removed, at this crisis, doubtless the omniscient God, who in such cases, calls things which are not, as

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*if they* were, approves and rewards those works of holiness which he discerned in the Spirit of the mind, though there was not opportunity for the actual performance of them.

In these respects we are not saved of works. But yet,

II. There is a sense in which good works are of absolute necessity to salvation. So the Apostle teaches us, when he says, "We are created in Christ Jesus to good works, which God has ordained, that we should walk in them."

(1.) They are necessary, as being radically included in that faith by which we are saved. "As the body without the Spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." Faith, as we have observed, includes repentance of sins, that are past, and a dedication of our future lives to the service of Christ. The word of God effectually works in them who believe. A disposition to works of righteousness, is as essential to faith, and therefore as necessary to salvation, as a trust in the righteousness of the Redeemer. The man, who, presuming that he has believed to the saving of his soul, reconciles himself to a wicked life, does but deceive his own heart; the truth is not in him.

(2.) A temper disposing us to good works, is a necessary qualification for heaven. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." And one that is born again, is created in Christ unto good works. "Without holiness no man can see the Lord." "Into heaven nothing enters that defiles." Whatever pretensions we may make to faith and the new creature, yet if we have not put off the old man which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness, it is manifest, that we are not renewed in the Spirit of our mind, nor have learnt the truth as it is in Jesus. Hence,

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(3.) Works are necessary as evidences of our faith in Christ, and of our title to heaven.

As these are the fruits of faith, so by them its sincerity is proved. This was the Apostle's rejoicing, the testimony of his conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, he had his conversation in the world. His persuasion, that there was laid up for him a crown of righteousness, arose from a consciousness, that he had fought a good fight, and kept the faith. He exhorts Christians to give diligence unto the full assurance of hope, and, for this purpose, to be followers of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

(4.) Good works essentially belong to religion. They are binding upon us in the obvious reason of things, and by the express command of God. That we should honor and worship the great and glorious Creator, on whom we continually depend—that we should be just, faithful and beneficent to our fellow men, with whom we are nearly connected—that we should use the bounties of heaven with sobriety and temperance—and that we should bring our appetites and passions under the dominion of our reason, which is the superior faculty of man, is naturally fit and right, and explicitly required in the divine word. Nothing can remove or diminish our obligation to be such manner of persons in all our conversation: Lest we should imagine, that faith supersedes this obligation, the gospel gives it in charge, "that they who have believed in God should be careful to maintain good works, because they are profitable to men." The Apostle with abhorrence repels the suggestion, that Christians, because they are under grace, may therefore continue in sin; for, says he, "How shall they who are dead to sin, live any longer therein?"

(5.) Works are necessary to adorn our profession, and honor our religion before men. Christians are exhorted to exhibit the virtues of the gospel in their common conversation, that the word of God may not be blasphemed, nor the way of truth evil spoken of; but,

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on the contrary, the enemies of religion, beholding in the professors of it, a pattern of good works, may glorify God in the day of visitation.

Lastly: Works are necessary, as by them we are to be judged in the great day of the Lord. This is the constant doctrine of the gospel, that Jesus Christ, to whom all judgment is committed, will render to every man according to his works—according to the deeds done in the body. Though heaven is the purchase of Christ, yet it is promised only to them who seek it by a patient continuance in well doing. They only who do the commandments have a right to enter into the holy city. Though the righteousness of the Redeemer, and not our own, is the ground of our acceptance; yet, for the encouragement of virtue and holiness, God assures us, that the future happiness of believers will be measured out to them, in a greater or less degree, according as they have more or less abounded in works of righteousness. "Let us therefore be stedfast and unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as we know, that our labor is not in vain in the Lord."

III. Our last observation is, that the necessity of works does not diminish the grace of God in our salvation, nor afford us any pretence for boasting.

The whole scheme of redemption originated in God's selfmoving mercy. It was not the works or the prayers of men that brought Jesus down from heaven; but the preventing grace and love of God that gave his Son to die for their sins. It was not their sagacity which discovered; but his wisdom which revealed this glorious Saviour, and the marvellous plan of salvation through him. It was not their will that fixed; but his sovereign grace that stated the terms of salvation; and his promise is the foundation of our hope. Neither our faith, nor repentance, nor works can be considered as making atonement for past sins: That our salvation stands in connexion with these terms, is owing wholly

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to the grace of God. It is of grace, that we are brought to a knowledge of, and faith in Jesus, and are disposed to the performance of works really good. "Faith is the gift of God." The means of faith are from him: The word of revelation is not our procurement, but his gracious bestowment. It is by his kind influence, that we are excited to attend on the instructions of his word. It is his Spirit, that gives the word a saving power. "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to good works."—"By the grace of God," says St. Paul, "I am what I am." It is by the power of God, that we are kept through faith unto salvation. If we live, yet we live not by ourselves, but Christ liveth in us. If we labor, it is not by our own power, but by the grace of God which is with us.

Our spiritual services are acceptable only by Jesus Christ, not by their own intrinsic worth. Were our works ever so perfect, yet between them and the reward promised to them, there is no proportion. Therefore, though believers have their fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life, yet this is the gift of God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

## IMPROVEMENT.

1. Humility essentially belongs to the Christian temper. The believer perceives his own unworthiness, and his dependence on the grace of God. He knows he has no cause for boasting, and he feels no disposition to it. Where faith operates, the soul is humbled. So faith used to operate, and so it does still. They who, on the apprehension of a title to salvation, are puffed up with pride in themselves, and contempt of others, discover manifest signs of the want of gospel faith.

2. The mighty preparation which God has made for our recovery from the ruins of the apostacy, teaches us, that the human race is of great importance in the scale

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of rational beings, and in the scheme of God's universal government. Though in ourselves we are unworthy of God's notice, yet he has done much for us—more than we could have asked—more than we can even think. He must, then, have some great designs to accomplish by us. His glory is in some way or other to be wonderfully displayed in us. Let us now fall in with the design of his rich mercy and grace, lest hereafter we should stand everlasting monuments of his ireful justice, against perverseness and ingratitude.

3. It infinitely concerns us to comply with the proposals of the gospel.

A salvation procured in the manner which the gospel discovers, is great and important beyond all imagination. If we neglect this, proportionably great and awful will be our destruction. If without the grace here revealed, our state would be wretched and hopeless: How dreadful must be the condition of those who reject this grace? If he who sinned against the law, fell under a sentence of death, without any mercy promised him, How sore will be the punishment of those who despise the grace and grieve the spirit of God, and tread under foot the blood of a dying Saviour?

4. Let no man flatter himself, that he is in a state of salvation, as long as he lives in the neglect of good works.

*These* are the fruits of that faith by which we are saved. If these are wanting, the root of the matter is not in us. The hope, comfort and joy of Christian professors, must greatly depend on their care to maintain those works, to which true believers are created, and which God has ordained that they should walk in them. They who rise to the joy of hope, on some transient religious exercises, before they have had opportunity to manifest their sincerity by the performance of religious duties, greatly dishonor religion and dangerously impose on themselves. And they who pre-

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sume to pronounce others in a converted state, before their faith has appeared in its works, and their repentance in its fruits, it is to be feared often flatter deluded souls to their eternal destruction.

5. Let us be careful, that we mistake not the nature of good works.

Works really good must proceed from a good principle—from a principle of faith. And as faith is a belief of the gospel, so works flowing from it will be conformed to the gospel. They will be accompanied with a correspondent temper, regulated by the divine precepts, and produced by the influence of gospel doctrines. If then we believe that we are God's workmanship, let us walk worthy of the Lord to all pleasing, and abound in all the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.

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# SERMON XIII.

## *The Deplorable State of Heathens and Unbelievers.*

EPHESIANS ii. 11, 12.

*Wherefore remember, that ye were in time passed Gentiles in the flesh, who are called uncircumcision by that which is called the circumcision in the flesh made by hands; that, at that time, ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world.*

As the Ephesian church consisted partly of Jews, and partly of Gentiles, the Apostle in this letter addresses himself sometimes to the one and sometimes to the other, separately, and often to both jointly. The passage now read he directs to the believers, "who in times past were Gentiles in the flesh." He says in the following words, "Ye, who sometimes were afar off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ." In what respects they once were afar off, he explains, in the words chosen for our text. The following part of the chapter describes their present nearness.

What is now before us is to show, in what respects these Ephesians, before their conversion to the faith of Christ, were at a distance from God; and how the description here given of their unhappy state may be applied to sinners under the gospel.



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I. The Apostle calls upon them to remember that "they were in time past Gentiles in the flesh."

He admonishes them not to forget the dismal state of Heathenism out of which they had lately been called; but often to reflect upon it with attention and seriousness, that they might ever maintain a humble sense of their own unworthiness, and awaken in their souls thankful and admiring apprehensions of that grace which had wrought in them so glorious a change.

We are here taught that Christians, who have been the favored subjects of God's renewing grace, ought to remember their former guilty condition, and the awful danger from which they have escaped. God says to Jerusalem, after her happy restoration, "Thou shalt remember thy ways, and be ashamed. I will establish my covenant with thee, that thou mayest remember and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done." The Apostle Paul, after his conversion to the gospel, frequently reviews, and deeply laments his former life, calling himself a blasphemer, a persecutor and chief of sinners, and he acknowledges with grateful admiration, the mercy of God, which had revealed Christ in him, and put him into the gospel ministry.

A recollection of former stupidity, impenitence and guilt keeps the Christian humble and watchful, enlivens his gratitude to God, and warms his zeal in religion. He is not disposed to exalt himself on account of the spiritual charge, which, he hopes, has taken place in him: He is rather inclined to think others better than himself, being conscious of greater vileness and guilt in himself, than he can discern in them. While he rejoices in the humble persuasion, that he is a new creature, he acknowledges, that by the grace of God he is what he is. He adores that grace, which has placed him under the means of salvation, and rendered these means effectual to renew his heart. He takes no

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glory to himself, but lives by faith in that grace which has already formed him to a spiritual temper and life. They who, after a supposed conversion, forgetting what they once were, indulge a confidence in themselves and a contempt of others, give sad proofs, that their conversion is not from sin to God, but only from stupidity to pride—from carelessness to vain glory.

II. The Apostle reminds these Ephesian converts of that contempt, with which they once had been treated by the Jews. "Ye were called the uncircumsion by that which is called the circumcision in the flesh made by hands."

When God chose the seed of Abraham to be a peculiar people to himself, he instituted circumcision as a seal of his covenant with them, a mark of distinction from heathens and idolators, and a sign of their high privileges and obligations. But the Jews, in the latter period of their national existence, instead of improving this gracious distinction to humility, gratitude and obedience, perverted it to pride, selfconfidence and contempt of mankind. They gloried in themselves as the seed of Abraham and the children of God, reprobated other nations as his enemies, treated them as unclean, and not only excluded them from the benefit of religious communion, but even denied them the common offices of humanity. And we find, that one of their greatest objections against the gospel was, that it offered salvation to the Gentiles.

Hypocrites are apt to value themselves upon their external privileges, and to confine salvation to themselves and those of their party and complexion. The sincere Christian values his external privileges as means of holiness. He rejoices in them. not as what directly intitle him to heaven, but as what, he hopes, may be the means of fitting him for heaven. Possessed of the benevolent Spirit of the gospel, he wishes that others may enjoy the same privileges with himself. He chooses to think, that there is much real godliness among those

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who have never known all his advantages, or joined themselves to his community. On such he looks rather with compassion than contempt: and on himself, with concern rather than confidence. He admires the sovereign grace of God, which has made him to differ, and he is solicitous so to improve the gracious distinction, that it may turn to his salvation—not to his condemnation.

III. The Apostle tells them, that, "at that time, they were without Christ."

To the Jews were chiefly confined the discoveries which God made of a Saviour to come. From them, in their captivities and dispersions, the Gentiles obtained that knowledge which they had of this wonderful and glorious person. The knowledge which they thus acquired, was imperfect, mixed with error and uncertainty, and at best, extended only to a few. The Jews, in the times near to Christ's appearance, had generally embraced the opinion, that the Messiah, in the character of a temporal prince, would erect a kingdom in *their* country, and give *them* dominion over the other nations of the earth. However *they* might glory in the expectation of such a Saviour, the Gentiles contemplating him in this character, would regard his appearance as a calamity, rather than a blessing. As the Gentiles in general had no knowledge of Christ, and what intimations were given them by the Jews, were uncertain and erroneous, the Apostle might truly say, "They were without Christ."

What think you of their condition?—Was it not exceedingly to be lamented?—How affecting must it be to this benevolent Apostle, to see whole nations—innumerable multitudes of intelligent and immortal beings, involved in guilt and ruin, and ignorant of the only way of deliverance? Can you wonder, that he encountered so many dangers and deaths, to spread among these poor Gentiles the knowledge of the Redeemer's name? But let me ask you, Why was this knowledge

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desirable ?—Was it not, that, by faith in him, and submission to him, they might obtain an interest in the great salvation which he has brought to a guilty world ? You have the knowledge of Christ. To you his gospel has come. But if you live in unbelief, what benefit do you expect from him ?—What is your condition better than theirs ?—You will say, "You are not in unbelief; You acknowledge, that Jesus is a divine Saviour, and his gospel a divine revelation." Thus far is well. But have you submitted to Christ as a Saviour ? Are you governed by his gospel ? If not, your faith is vain ; it will never save you. When your faith is accompanied with repentance of sin, and a purpose of new obedience ; when it produces an habitual conformity of heart to the religion which Christ has taught, then you have believed to the salvation of your souls. Until you have such a faith as this, you are as truly without Christ, as they who have never heard of him. If you think the condition of the heathens deplorable, because they have not heard of Christ, how deplorable must be your condition, who have heard of him, and yet in heart reject him ?—If they perish, it may be pleaded in mitigation of their doom, that they knew not the way of deliverance. But for you who believe, that God has sent his Son to redeem you, what excuse can be urged, if still you despise the salvation offered you ? —That knowledge, which you think so distinguishing a privilege, will turn to your greater condemnation. Go then, humbly submit to this Saviour, and penitently rely on his atonement, and thus secure an interest in the salvation which he has purchased, lest you fall under a more awful doom, than they who are without the knowledge of him. Every day you live in impenitence, your condition is in some respects more dangerous than theirs, to whom the word of salvation has never been sent.

IV. The Apostle farther observes, that these Ephesians were "aliens from the commonwealth of Israel."

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To the Israelites pertained the service of God. To the forms of worship instituted in the Mosaic law none were admitted but Jews, and such as were proselyted to the Jewish religion. All uncircumcised heathens were excluded as aliens. The Apostle says, verse 14, "Christ has broken down the middle wall of partition, which was between us;" between Jews and Gentiles. He alludes to the partition wall in the temple, which separated the court of the Gentiles from the holy place, into which the Jews might enter; but no alien could be admitted.

The gospel has instituted a service more pure and spiritual than that appointed by the law of Moses; and all Christians are a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. By his blood they have boldness to enter into the holiest, in a new and living way.

Now if the Gentiles were unhappy in an exclusion from the service of the Jewish sanctuary, How guilty are they who exclude themselves from the more excellent service of the Christian church? If they who were denied admission to the ancient temple, were in so dangerous a case, How awful is the case of those, who contemptuously turn away from gospel ordinances, when their attendance is not only permitted, but required?

We have much stronger inducements to attend on the service of God under the gospel, than Gentiles could have to join themselves to the commonwealth of Israel. The Christian service is more simple and easy, more pure and spiritual, than the Jewish; success is more surely promised; greater assistance is offered; richer blessings are exhibited; the intercession of an all prevailing Mediator is more expressly revealed.

If some of those friends, with whom we mingle in our common employments and amusements, were under an absolute exclusion from the privilege of uniting

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in the devotions of the church, and attending on the means of knowledge and salvation, should we not think them very unhappy?—Should we not look upon them with sensible pity and concern, whenever we met them? In the good providence of God, we are allowed this privilege. But how many despise it;—They who will not use a privilege when they have it, are not at all the better for it. Their condition is not happier, than if they never had received it: Nay; it is more—far more guilty and wretched. The Apostle speaks of those, who put from them the word of God, as judging themselves unworthy of eternal life, and bringing on their souls a wonderful destruction.

V. The Apostle adds: "They were strangers from the covenants of promise."

A covenant, in common acceptation, is an agreement between two parties, in which a promise is made on certain conditions, to be mutually performed. God's dealings with men are called by this name in allusion to such usages among them. Though there is not an exact similarity in all points, yet there is a resemblance in this main point, that we become entitled to promised blessings by a compliance with required conditions. But then, it should be remembered, whatever the conditions are, they in no sense *deserve* the blessings; nor are they performed by our own independent ability; nor is the consent to perform them, optional, as in human covenants: But the blessings promised are gifts from God—the conditions required are performed by grace derived from him—and the whole plan of the covenant is constituted for us by his wisdom, and enjoined upon us by his authority.

It is observable; Apostle here speaks of *covenants*, more than one. So in Romans ix. 4. He says, "To the Jews belonged the *covenants*. He probably refers to the covenant with Abraham, which because it was several times renewed and promulged, may be called *The Covenants*.

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This was eminently a covenant of *promise*. It contained that great and glorious promise, which is the substance of the gospel, that the Lord would be a God to him and to his seed, through that Saviour, in whom all the families of the earth should be blessed. This covenant with Abraham was repeated to Isaac and to Jacob; and afterward proclaimed to the nation of the Jews; it was illustrated and explained by the prophets, and still more fully displayed and confirmed by the gospel. This was properly the covenant of grace; and it embraced all believers of all nations, as well as the natural descendants of Abraham. "As many as are of the faith are blessed with faithful Abraham." "They who are Christ's are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." "The blessing of Abraham," that God would be a God to him and his seed, "is come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ."

Now the Apostle observes, that the Gentiles were strangers to this covenant of promise. The discovery of it, until the Saviour came, was almost wholly confined to the Jews. How unhappy was the condition of the Gentile world, in those dark and benighted ages, which preceded the gospel! They knew the judgment of God, that sinners like them were worthy of death; but knew not the way of pardon and peace. They had only a general apprehension of God's goodness, not any express promise, on which to ground their hope. Most of them had such absurd notions of the divine character, and such faint conceptions of futurity, that they sunk down into an unfeeling stupidity. "They walked in the vanity of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that was in them because of the blindness of their hearts, and being past feeling, gave themselves over to work all uncleanness with greediness."

Happy are we in a full discovery of the covenant of grace. In the gospel which is come to us, the bles-

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tings of pardon and eternal life are more expressly promised, and that faith and repentance, which are the conditions of those blessings, are more clearly stated, than they were in former dispensations. And if we, who are acquainted with the terms and the promises of the covenant, finally reject them, our case will be far more wretched than theirs who were strangers to them. "It had been better for us not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after we have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto us." Let us then flee for refuge to lay hold on the hope set before us. I proceed to observe,

VI. The Gentiles are said to "have had no hope." They had no clear and distinct hope of a future existence.

Many of them scarcely believed, or even thought of a life beyond this. They had no apprehension, hardly the idea of a restoration of the body. Those who believed a future state had but obscure, and some of them, very absurd conceptions of it. Still more ignorant were they of the qualifications necessary for happiness after death. Some discovery of these important matters was made by the Jewish revelation; but it is by the gospel only, that life and immortality are brought to light.

This elucidates and confirms the arguments, which reason suggests, in favor of a future state; such as the present unequal distribution of rewards and punishments; our natural capacity for higher improvements than our condition in this world will permit; the impossibility that such as die young should ever answer the purposes of a rational existence, unless they exist in another state; the ardent desire of immortality which is implanted in every breast, and which sensibly operates in all, except where it is overpowered by corrupt principles and vicious habits. And besides these; it has made explicit declarations and promises of the resurrection of the body and a future existence, and con-



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firmed them by a plain obvious fact, the resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and a teacher sent from him.

It has not only taught us in general, that there will be another life, but has informed us of many important circumstances relating to it; particularly, that, in some unknown period of duration, there will be an end of the human succession, and of the probationary existence of mankind—that then will commence a general judgment of the world—that into this judgment will be brought every work of man, with every secret thing—that rewards and punishments will be dispensed according to men's different characters, and proportioned to their different degrees of holiness or wickedness—that, in the conclusion of the judgment, the wicked will go away into everlasting punishment, and the righteous into life eternal.

We have now a glorious hope set before us. Guilty and unworthy as we are, we may be reconciled unto God by the death, and saved by the life of Jesus. So rich and extensive is the grace revealed in the gospel, that a consciousness of past guilt is no just ground of discouragement to those who feel the workings of godly sorrow, and the resolutions of new obedience. "The righteousness of God, through the faith of Christ is unto all, and upon all them who believe, and there is no difference."

Do we think with compassion and concern on the case of those, who know not the way of peace, and have no hope?—Let us not then despise the glorious hope proposed to us, but receive it with thankfulness and joy. In a way of repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ, the gospel sets before us the hope of a glorious immortality; but if we continue in unbelief and impenitence, we can have no part in the matter. Are there not many, who, if they were to speak seriously, must confess, that by the

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terms of the gospel, they are excluded from the blessedness proposed? Will you live as the Gentiles formerly lived, without hope? Will you put yourselves in a condition worse than theirs, when you enjoy so high advantages? Will you turn the means of hope into occasions of present guilt and future despair? Lay hold on this hope, while it is within your reach—Seek for eternal life by a patient continuance in well doing—Give diligence to the full assurance of hope to the end—be not slothful, but followers of them, who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

VII. The last character of these Gentiles is, that "they were without God in the world." They were Atheists in a world, in which God was manifest.

The Heathens generally had some apprehension of a Deity; but they were without a knowledge of the one true God, and without a just idea of his character. They did service to them who by nature were no gods; or, if they knew something of God, yet "they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for-ever."

To us, who have been early taught the existence and government of one Supreme, all Perfect Being, nothing is more unaccountable, than the atheism and idolatry, which have appeared in the world. To us it is astonishing, that any should deny the existence of an eternal, independent power, and ascribe to chance and fate all the things which we behold; and no less astonishing, that any should imagine the godhead to be like unto gold and silver and stone, graven by art and man's device.

But while we condemn the atheist and the idolater, let us take heed lest we also fall under the same condemnation. Many, who profess to know God, in

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works deny him. Many, who would not kneel to a graven image, or prostrate themselves before the rising sun, still serve the creature more than the Creator, love mammon more than God, and are governed more by their own lusts than by his will.

However clearly you can demonstrate the existence and providence of God, and whatever rational sentiments you entertain concerning his character and government; if you seek not his favor with your whole heart, and in preference to every worldly interest—if you forget him in your ordinary concerns, and acknowledge him not in your daily wants and supplies—if you neglect to maintain communion with him by meditation, thanksgiving and prayer—if you indulge a temper, and pursue a course contrary to his will; you are, as really as the atheist, without God in the world. While you condemn those, who, in contradiction to the plainest evidence, say, there is no God, How will you justify yourselves, who in contradiction to your own belief, live as if there were no God?

There are more atheists in the world, than profess themselves such. "The transgression of the wicked saith, there is no fear of God before his eyes." How unaccountable is the stupidity of sinners! God is not far from them: He loads them with blessings, satisfies them with good, fills them with gladness; yet they know him not, or will not regard him. *This* God calls the heavens to behold with astonishment: "I have nourished and brought up children, but they have rebelled against me! The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib, but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider! Who hath heard such a thing? Hath a nation changed her gods, which yet are no gods? but my people hath changed their glory for that which doth not profit. They have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and have hewed them out broken cisterns, which can hold no water."

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Let us lament the atheism and idolatry of our own hearts. Since we know God, let us glorify him as God, by thankfulness and obedience. Let us, by the discoveries of his character made before our eyes, and the exercises of his goodness which we daily experience, be persuaded to present ourselves living sacrifices holy and acceptable to him; for this is our reasonable service.

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# SERMON XIV.

## *The Happiness of Believers in Nearness to God.*

EPHESIANS ii. 13—18.

*But now in Christ Jesus, ye who sometimes were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us; having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances, for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace; and that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby; and came and preached peace to you who were afar off, and to them that were nigh; for through him we both have an access by one Spirit unto the Father.*

IN the preceding verses, the Apostle reminds the Gentile believers in Ephesus, in what respects they had formerly lived at a distance from God. They were Gentiles in the flesh—they were by Jews despised, as not having the mark and sign of God's people—they were without the knowledge of Christ—they were excluded from the privilege of worshipping God in his sanctuary—they were strangers to the gracious promise of the covenant—they had no sure hope of a future life—and they were without God in the world.

In the words now read, he describes that happy state of nearness to God, into which they were brought by the gospel. "He says, verse 13, Ye who sometimes

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were far off, are made nigh by the blood of Christ." The circumstances of this nearness he distinctly illustrates in the following words, which we will now open and apply.

I. They were brought within *the church of God*, and admitted to equal privileges with his ancient people the Jews.

The seed of Abraham were the people, whom God chose, and whom he caused to approach near to himself. To them he shewed his statutes and his judgments: he dealt not so with any other nation. The Gentiles he left afar off from him. "But now," says the Apostle, "*these* are made nigh in Christ," as well as the Jews. "Christ is our peace." He has made a peace—a union between Jews and Gentiles. "He has made both to be one." He has formed them into one church, and given them an equal share in gospel privileges, so that one has no preeminence above the other. Christ says, "I lay down my life for the sheep;" not merely for those of the ancient fold; "for I have other sheep, which are not of this fold: Them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold and one Shepherd."

"He has broken down the middle wall of partition which was between us." He has abolished the ceremonial law, which was a wall of separation between Jews and other nations. The Apostle alludes to the wall in the temple, which divided the court of the Gentiles from the holy place, where the Jews were allowed to worship. On this wall, Josephus says, it was written, "that no alien might go through it."

The Apostle adds, "Christ hath abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments, consisting in ordinances, to make in himself of two one new man, so making peace" between them. That which made the enmity, or separation between Jews and Gentiles was the law of ceremonies and ordinances; for these were peculiar to the Jews: Uncircum-

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cised Gentiles were not admitted to them. These Christ has abolished in his flesh. The great intention of them was to prefigure Christ's sufferings in the flesh for the sins of the world. When he offered himself on the cross, he abolished these ordinances as being no longer of use, and thus removed the enmity, or the occasion of distinction between Jews and Gentiles. So the Apostle says in his epistle to the Colossians. "He hath made peace through the blood of the cross, and hath blotted out the hand writing of ordinances, which was against us" Gentiles, "and hath taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross."

As the death of Christ was designed alike for the benefit of all nations, so when he removed the law of ceremonies given to the Jews, he instituted a more simple way of worship, which should be common to Gentiles, as well as Jews. As he made no distinction between them in the design of his death, so he would allow none to be made in regard of the privileges of his worship; but would reconcile both in one body.

You here see, and you ought to remember, that one great design of Christ's death was to abolish former distinctions, to unite all nations in one church, and to create in himself one new man, so making peace. He has purchased the church with his blood, and his church is one. Though, for the convenience of worship, it may be divided into many members, still it is one body in him. He is the head of the church, and the Saviour of the body.

Hence it follows, that all contentions, divisions and separations in the church of Christ, are a direct opposition to the design of his death. As the members of a particular church ought to walk together in peace, so particular churches should maintain communion with one another. They should cooperate in building up the great kingdom of their common Lord, until they all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto the measure of the stature of

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the fulness of Christ. Christians may entertain different opinions in the less important doctrines of the gospel, and may practise different usages in the worship of God; but as long as they hold the head, on which all the members depend, and as long as they call on the name of the same Lord Jesus Christ, they should regard and treat each other as fellow members in him.

Most of the Churches planted by the Apostles, consisted both of Jews and Gentiles. These, having been differently educated, and still retaining some of their ancient habits, often fell into troublesome contentions. But in these cases Paul always inculcated forbearance, condescension and charity. While he required the churches to purge out the openly wicked and ungodly, he cautioned believers not to judge and condemn one another for circumstantial differences, and exhorted them, wherein they were agreed, to walk by the same rule.

If we separate from the communion of our brethren for differences, which enter not into the essence of religion; or if we renounce fellowship with particular churches, which still, we have reason to hope, Christ has owned and blessed, we not only oppose the plain instructions of the gospel, but counteract one great design of Christ's death, which was to destroy all enmity, and reconcile his disciples in one body.

It is the duty of all Christians to excite one another to love and good works, and to unite in advancing the common interest of pure religion. They are to seek, not merely their own profit, but the profit of many. They are not only to consult, each one his own personal edification; but to study the things which make for peace, and the things wherewith they may edify one another.

II. These Ephesians were brought near to God, as they were admitted to enjoy the *gospel*, which is a dispensation of grace and peace.



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The Apostle says, "Christ came and preached peace to you who were afar off, and to them that are near." Christ came to the *Ephesians*, not personally, but by the ministry of his Apostles, and preached pardon and salvation to them, as well as to the *Jews*.

If it is a happiness to enjoy peace with God, it is a privilege to hear it proclaimed, its nature explained, and its terms proposed. "Blessed are the people, who know the joyful sound."——"How beautiful are the feet of him, that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace, that bringeth glad tidings of good, that publisheth salvation, that saith unto Zion, Thy king reigneth."

As the Jews were said to be near to God, because to them pertained the giving of the law and the service of the sanctuary; so these Gentiles were now said to be made nigh, because to them was preached the gospel of peace, and the offer of salvation through a Redeemer.

If *they* were near to God in the enjoyment of Paul's ministry, we also are near; for to us are committed the truths taught by his ministry. The doctrines, which the Apostles preached, are contained in their writings. *These*, through the good Providence of God, are in our possession: We may consult them in the hours of retirement; we may hear them opened and applied in the sanctuary of God. We need not say, "Who shall ascend into heaven, to bring Christ down from above? Or, Who shall descend into the deep, to bring Christ up from the dead?" For the word is nigh us, even that same word of salvation which Christ preached, first in his own person, and then by the ministry of his Apostles. We are the people, who know the joyful sound, and to whom peace through Jesus Christ is proclaimed. God has brought us near to himself, to do his service in the tabernacle. He has sent to us the gospel of his Son: In the midst of us he has establish-

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ed his churches: We are invited to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple.

Our high privileges are not the effects of our own previous choice, but of God's sovereign grace. He has revealed to us those glorious things, which are hidden from millions of our fellow sinners.—Why is it so?—We can only say, "So it seemed good in his sight."

Let us remember, however, that to whom much is given, of them much will be required. The nearer we are brought to God, the farther shall we be banished from him, if we despise his grace. So our Lord says to Capernaum, in which he often preached and wrought miracles; "Thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be cast down to hell; for if the mighty works which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. Therefore it shall be more tolerable for Sodom in the day of judgment, than for thee."

III. Among these Ephesians, many were brought near to God by the *renovation of their souls* after his image.

The Apostle says to them, "In Christ ye are made nigh, for he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath abolished the enmity, to make in himself of twain one *new man*."

It was the design of the gospel, not only to unite Jews and Gentiles in one church, but to make them *new men*, that they might walk *in newness of life*. Accordingly the Apostle, in the 4th chapter, observes, that "they had been taught, as the truth is in Jesus, that they should put off, concerning their former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, should be renewed in the spirit of their mind, and should put on the *new man*, which, after God, is created in righteousness and true holiness." The old man signifies those evil habits which they had long indulged in their Heathenism. The

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new man is that life of holiness and righteousness which the gospel requires. This is called *true* holiness, and a *renewal* of the spirit, in distinction from those outward forms in which Jews, as well as Heathens, had once rested.

Now, when we are renewed in the spirit of the mind, and made holy in the hidden man of the heart, then we are brought near to God. All habitual sinners, how near soever in their visible privileges, are in their hearts far from him. They have in them a carnal mind, which is enmity against God, and will not be subject to his law. They are enemies in their minds by wicked works. They may profess to know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate. But true Christians are nigh to God, as they are partakers of his nature, renewed after his image, and conformed to his character.

If the enjoyment of the gospel brings us near to God, the efficacy of the gospel on our souls brings us nearer still; for this assimilates us to him. We may be near to him in external privileges, and yet be far off in the disposition of our minds. There are those, who draw near to God with their mouths, when their hearts are far from him. If we not only profess the word of truth, but are born of this incorruptible seed—this word, which liveth and abideth for ever, and have purified our souls in obeying the truth; then we may properly be said to be made nigh to God. "While we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with him."—"When we dwell in love, we dwell in God and he in us, for he is love."

Let us not content ourselves with a professed and visible nearness to God, but seek a spiritual union with him in a participation of the divine nature. Let us walk with him in the exercise of faith and love, in the contemplation of his perfections, in a sense of his presence, and in the observance of his commands,

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When we are renewed in the spirit of the mind and walk in newness of life, we may be said to come nigh to God; for then we are like him, and enjoy communion with him.

IV. This nearness to God farther implies a state of *peace with him.*

The Apostle here speaks, not only of a reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles, but of a reconciliation of both unto God. "Christ hath abolished the enmity, that he might make in himself of twain one new man —and that he might *reconcile both unto God* in one body by the cross."

As sinners are enemies to God in their minds, so they are objects of his holy displeasure. "He is angry with them every day." And his "salvation is far from them." They say unto God, "Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways." And a sentence, corresponding with this language of their hearts, is prepared for them;—"Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity; I know you not." But when they return to God by repentance, then his anger is turned away, and the sentence is revoked. When their enmity is slain, and their self exalting thoughts are humbled, then God receives them graciously and loves them freely; he is merciful to their unrighteousness, and remembers their sins no more. "Being justified by faith, they have peace with God through Jesus Christ." They are interested in that gracious promise, "I will be a God and a Father to you; and ye shall be my sons and daughters."—"There is no condemnation to them, because they are in Christ Jesus, and they walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

This reconciliation is effected "by the blood of" Christ shed on "the cross."—"The chastisement of our peace was laid on him."—"He suffered for our sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." And "God makes us accepted in the Belov-

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ed."—"He is in Christ reconciling the world to himself, not imputing their trespasses." Happy is the believer thus brought near unto God. "Blessed is the man, whose transgressions are thus forgiven, and his sins covered. Blessed is the man, to whom the Lord imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile." He looks back with astonishment on his former state of estrangement from God, and on the false security which he felt, while all his sins were unpardoned, and his guilty soul exposed to eternal condemnation. He mediates with thankful admiration on the mercy of God, which has brought him within the sound of the gospel, has awakened his attention to the danger of his condition and to the relief provided, and has given him repentance and the remission of sins. He views with delight the face of a reconciled God, and finds pleasure in the consciousness of a heart reconciled to him. He looks forward with the joy of hope to that day, when he shall be admitted still nearer to God, and shall mingle with saints and angels in his presence, where is fulness of joy and pleasures for evermore.

V. Another circumstance of the nearness mentioned in the text, is *access to God* in Prayer. "Through Christ reconciling us to God, *we both have access unto the Father.*"

The Jews drew near to God by the sacrifices of beasts; we may come nearer to him by the sacrifice of Christ. Of *this* the legal sacrifices were but types, and from *this* they derived all their virtue. And "if the blood of beasts, sprinkling the unclean, sanctified to the purifying of the flesh, How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge our consciences from dead works to serve the living God?"

The high priest under the law, having offered sacrifice for the sins of the people, entered by the blood of this sacrifice into the most holy place, to make inter-

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cession for them; and while he interceded for them there, they were praying without. But Christ by his own blood has entered into heaven to appear in the presence of God for us; and by his blood we now have boldness to enter into the holiest in that new and living way, which he has consecrated. Since we have such an high priest over the house of God, we may come boldly to his seat, and obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

Such is the grace of the gospel, that it calls *sinners*, under an awakening sense of guilt, to apply unto God, as a God of mercy in Christ Jesus, and gives them reason to hope, that their application will not be in vain. But there is a peculiar sense, in which true believers come nigh to him. They have those *promises* of assistance and acceptance, which others cannot appropriate. The Apostle says, "Through Christ we have access by faith into this grace, in which we stand and rejoice in hope of the glory of God."—"In him we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him."—"The Spirit helpeth our infirmities, and maketh intercession for us according to the will of God."

What a high privilege do Christians enjoy?—They come daily to God in prayer and praise. They tell him their wants, thank him for his bounties, and solicit farther supplies. They come to him in the name of a Mediator, who has purchased for them all the blessings which they need. They come to him as a covenant God, who has promised that he will never forsake them.

When they have such a clear and sensible view of God's holiness, wisdom, power and grace, as awakens their pious affections, raises them above earthly things, collects and fixes their thoughts, and excites more ardent desires of heaven, greater aversion to sin, and more active resolutions for duty; then may they be said to draw near to God with the heart. Then they enjoy

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spiritual communion with him. The Psalmist experienced in the sanctuary such an intercourse with God as this. There he saw God's power and glory, and felt the communications of divine light and love. This one thing he desired, that he might dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life. This was his language, "Whom have I in heaven but thee?—There is none upon earth that I desire besides thee.—It is good for me to draw near to God. I have put my trust in him."

VI. Another important circumstance of nearness to God, is the presence of his *holy Spirit.*"

The Apostle says, "We have access *by the Spirit* unto the Father."

The grace of the Spirit was granted, for the support and comfort of good men under the Old Testament. David prays, "Take not thy holy Spirit from me—uphold me with thy free Spirit." But under the gospel, which is a ministration of the Spirit, it is more explicitly promised, and more amply afforded. "God has shed forth the Spirit *abundantly* through Jesus Christ." The Spirit not only makes occasional visits to, but takes a stated residence with humble believers. They are his habitation—his temples. They walk in him, and are led by him. By him they are sanctified, strengthened and comforted. He helps their infirmities in prayer, witnesses to their adoption, and preserves them unto salvation. Christ says to his disciples, "If any man love me, him will my Father love, and we will come and make our abode with him." This spake he of the Spirit, which the Father would send in his name.

Happy is the good Christian in this nearness to God. Sensible of his own weakness, he rejoices in Christ, in whom all fulness dwells, and of whose fulness he may receive even grace for grace. Paul, when he felt his weakness, found himself strong. He took pleasure in infirmities, because the power of Christ rested upon

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*him*: He was contented in every state: He knew both how to be abased and how to abound: Through Christ strengthening him he could do all things. When he was crucified with Christ, he was still alive, because Christ lived in him. He acknowledged, that by God's grace he was made what he was; and he could say, the grace bestowed on him was not in vain. He labored the more abundantly; yet not he, but the grace of Christ that was with him.

To judge then, whether we have the Spirit dwelling in us, we must inquire, Whether the *works* of the Spirit can be found in us. Paul labored abundantly—was constant in duty—contented in every condition—humble in his thoughts of himself. We then have the best proof, that the grace of God is with us, when we can trace its happy effects.

I have now opened to you the several circumstances of that nearness to God, which the Apostle mentions as the high privilege of humble Christians.

The first and leading circumstances of this nearness we all enjoy. God's house and worship, his word and ordinances are nigh us. From our childhood we have known the holy scriptures, which are able to make us wise to salvation. Let us give glory to God, who thus has distinguished us from multitudes of our fellow creatures. Let us not, however content ourselves with such a nearness as this; but improve our favorable condition to a still greater and more important nearness. We may be made nigh in respect of privileges, and yet remain in our hearts afar off from God. It concerns us to examine, whether we are partakers of God's holiness, conformed to his will, reconciled to his government, and interested in his pardoning grace. If we are enemies in our minds, it concerns us immediately to renounce our enmity, and accept that glorious peace, which is purchased by the Son of God.

Let us praise God for the interposition of his Son, who is our peace. His death on the cross is the foun-



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dation of our habitual nearness to God, our actual approaches to him, and our comfortable hopes of the future enjoyment of him. He suffered for our sins, that he might bring us to God. He took on him *our* nature, that we might partake of the *divine*. In our nature he ascended to heaven, that we might follow him thither. He appears in the presence of God for us, that we may draw near in the full assurance of faith.

Let none despise the word dispensed, and the ordinances administered in the church. These are the means by which believers come near to God, receive the communications of his grace, and obtain a preparation for glory. However lightly some may esteem these means, pious souls find them highly useful to warm their holy affections, strengthen their good resolutions, improve their virtuous tempers, and bring them nearer to heaven.

Let none imagine, that they are above the need of divine ordinances; nor yet let any suppose, that religion mainly consists in the observance of them; but let all regard them as the means of holiness, and attend upon them, with a view to bring their souls nearer to God in the love of his character, and in the practice of every duty.

Our subject instructs us, when we may be said to enjoy God's presence in religious worship. It is, when we draw near to him in such a manner, that the true end of worship is answered—when a holy temper is increased, holy resolutions confirmed, an aversion to sin strengthened, and faith and humility promoted. It is not merely the elevation of affection in God's worship, which indicates his presence with us: A better proof is the correspondence of our hearts to the design of his worship, which is the promotion of knowledge, faith, holiness, charity, heavenliness, and constancy in duty.—In a word, when we find, that God's ordinances make us better, we may conclude that we have been with him.

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How great is the evil of sin! It is this which separates the soul from God. In nearness to him consists the felicity of rational beings: Distance from him is their misery; all pretences to happiness are vain, while man is a stranger to God. Let him be surrounded with all the riches, honors and joys that the world can give; still, if he is far from God, he is far from happiness. He who is without God, has no hope. Do the sensual and profane boast of pleasures, when God is not in all their thoughts?—How vain are these pleasures! How unsatisfying—how transient! In the moment of death they will vanish forever, and leave the soul overwhelmed with sorrow.

Let us be afraid of every thing that tends to draw us away from God; and love every thing, which brings us nearer to him. Let us seek him with our whole hearts; preserve daily communion with him; choose his favor as our happiness, his service as our employment, his word as our guide, his ordinances as our refreshment, his house as the gate of heaven, and heaven as our eternal home.

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# SERMON XV.

## *The Nature, Foundation and Design of the Christian Church.*

EPHESIANS ii. 19—22.

*Now therefore ye are no more strangers, but fellow citizens with the Saints and of the household of God, and are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone; in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.*

THESE Ephesian Gentiles, as the Apostle observes, had in times past been aliens from the commonwealth or citizenship of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise, without Christ, and afar off from God. But by the gospel there was a great change made in their condition. They were brought near to God, and the enmity between the Jews and them was abolished by the blood of the cross, so that both were now reconciled to God in one body, and were become one new man. "Therefore," says the Apostle in the text, "ye are no more strangers and foreigners," as ye were formerly, "but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God."

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He describes the Christian church as a *city* or *household*—He teaches us the nature of that *foundation* on which the building stands—He signifies that the building, for its permanence and security, must be *united* to the foundation—and, finally, that it may grow into an holy temple, and become an habitation of God; all the parts must be *framed* into, and *incorporated* with one another.

I. The Apostle represents the church of God under the figure of a *city*, and a *household*.

1. A church must resemble a family or city, in respect of *order* and *government*; for without these a religious society can no more subsist, than a civil community, or a household.

In a city there must be laws to regulate the manners of the citizens, and officers to publish and administer the laws. So it must be in the church of God. The laws of this sacred community are immediately instituted by God himself; and by him officers are appointed to explain these laws, inculcate obedience to them, reprove the violations of them, and hold up to general view the solemn sanctions annexed to them. Though he does not directly indigitate the *persons*, who are to act as officers in his church, yet he has prescribed the necessary qualifications for, and the mode of introduction to the instituted office; and without a regular call and induction, no man has a right to assume a sacred, any more than a civil function. As in a civil community every appointment to office must be agreeable to the constitution; so in the church, every appointment must be agreeable to the gospel, which is the great charter of its privileges. If in a state every man, who pleased, might usurp the powers of magistracy, and demand obedience from his fellow citizens, there would be nothing but riot and confusion: So it would be in the church, if every person, at his option, might officiate as a public ruler or teacher. In this case, a church would resemble *Babel*, rather than a

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well regulated city. Officers in Christ's church are to act, not as having dominion over the faith and conscience, but as being helpers of the knowledge and comfort of their fellow Christians. They are to apply the threatenings, and, in some cases, the censures of Christ their Lord, for the conviction and reformation of the unruly; but they are not to act as Lords over Christ's heritage: Whatever authority they have, they are to use it only for edification, not for destruction.

Now as God has instituted government in his church, for the promotion of holiness and good works, so to this government every one is bound to submit. What would you think of a man, who should profess himself a citizen of the state, and yet should claim an exemption from its jurisdiction?—Just the same must you think of a man, who professes to be a Christian, and yet lives at large, without subjecting himself to the discipline of any Christian church.

There are those who pretend to believe the gospel, and who have much to say about the church, and yet never own themselves subject to Christ's authority in it. They never have explicitly covenanted to walk in communion with this, or that, or any other church of Christ. They consider themselves as totally exempt from Christian jurisdiction. Now why is not this as great an inconsistency in the religious, as the same conduct would be in the civil life. The truth is, every man who believes the gospel is bound to submit to all its plain institutions; and since Christ has ordained, that his diciples shall unite in societies for mutual watchfulness, edification and comfort, every man is obliged to comply with this institution, by walking in fellowship with some Christian church. And they who imagine, they are not under the same obligations as others, or are not subjects of Christian discipline equally with others, because they never have joined themselves to any particular church, should consider, that they have no right to live in this loose and discon-

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nected manner, and therefore their excuse is of no avail.

2. In a city, or household, all the members have a mutual relation, and partake in the common privileges; and, though they are placed in different stations and conditions, they must all contribute to the general happiness. So Christians are called fellow citizens, brethren, and members one of another. They are all related to the same universal parent, who is above all, through all, and in them all. They dwell in the same house, the church, meet at the same table, and eat of the same bread. They should therefore regard one another as brethren, feel for each other's welfare, and, according to their respective abilities, promote the general edification and comfort.

3. *In a city*, and also in a family, there is a common interest. Though each member has certain separate rights, yet there are some great concerns, which belong to the whole, and which are the object of the union. So it is in the church of Christ. We are called into this sacred kind of society, that we may be fellow helpers in the same great design, the promotion of religion and the common salvation. Every Christian in his private capacity, is to work out his own salvation; but, as a member of the church, he is to regard the salvation of others. The gospel directs us to consider one another, that we may provoke unto love and good works—to study the things wherewith one may edify another—to seek not merely our own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

As all the members of a particular church should cooperate in advancing her spiritual interest, so all churches should concur in building up the common interests of Christ's kingdom. A particular member is never to disturb the peace, and obstruct the edification of the church, under pretence of personal edification: Neither ought a collection of Christians to take such measures for building up themselves, as tend to

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the disquietude or dissolution of other churches. But all should act as fellow citizens in one grand community, and as brethren in one affectionate family. The common edification is one principal end of social worship; and for this end every Christian ought to attend upon it, even though he should find but little benefit accrue to himself.

If a member of civil society should renounce every useful employment, and give himself up to pleasure or indolence, because he had acquired a fortune adequate to all his own exigences, he would be thought unworthy the name of a good citizen. We should tell him, Whatever affluence he enjoyed, he was bound to employ his abilities for the benefit of his fellow citizens; and he had no right to live merely to himself. So if a professor of religion should discontinue his support of, or attendance on the social worship of God, under pretence of such superior religious attainments, as raised him above the need of public instruction, he would forfeit the character of a good Christian; for every one is bound to consult the common edification, as well as his own.

4. In a well ordered city, or household, there will be peace and unity: So there ought to be in a Christian church. Neither a civil, nor a religious community can long subsist, when it is divided against itself. Christians are therefore required to study the things which make for peace—to forbear one another in love—to be likeminded one toward another, that they may with one mind and one mouth glorify God.

The Apostle, having compared the Christian church to a house, continues the allusion by representing, in the second place,

II. The *manner* in which it is *founded*. As every building must have a basis on which to rest; so likewise, must the church of God. "This," our Apostle says, "is built on the foundation of the apostles and

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prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone."

The mediation of Christ is the foundation of our faith and hope. The apostles and prophets are a foundation only as they describe and exhibit to us the doctrines and works, the atonement and intercession of the Redeemer. In him all the doctrines of the prophets and apostles meet and unite, as the stones in a foundation are fixed and bound together by the corner stone. The Apostle Peter, alluding to the words of Isaiah, says, "Coming unto Christ as a living stone, chosen of God, and precious, be ye as living stones, built up a spiritual house; as it is contained in the scriptures, Behold I lay in Zion a chief corner stone, elect, precious, and he that believeth shall not be confounded. Unto you who believe he is precious, but to the disobedient the stone which the builders disallowed is become the head of the corner, a stone of stumbling, and and a rock of offence." St. Paul says to the Corinthians, "According to the grace of God given unto me, I have laid the foundation," by preaching Christ to you, "for other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ."

Mankind are by the gospel considered as in a fallen and ruined state. The great design of this revelation is, to bring the happy tidings and proposals of salvation to a guilty world. It opens the glorious plan, and states the gracious terms of this salvation. But then it always teaches us to regard Jesus Christ, as the foundation of our faith and hope. It is by his death that pardon and life are purchased. It is by his mediation that free access to God is procured. It is by his intercession that our fervent prayers find audience, and our best works meet acceptance. The prophets laid the foundation of faith by the discoveries which they made of this glorious Saviour. The Apostles have laid a foundation by preaching the same Saviour. "We preach not ourselves," says St. Paul, "but Christ



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Jesus, the Lord, and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake."

The church of God is built on those doctrines, which respect Christ. This is not a civil community incorporated for worldly purposes; but a religious society united for spiritual ends. Not a temporal interest, but an everlasting salvation is the real object of its institution. And as this salvation is purchased by, and offered through Jesus Christ, so the very idea of a Christian church supposes a belief of those doctrines which mark the way of salvation, and a reliance on those promises which ensure a title to it.

It is not every error in doctrine, that will destroy the being of a church. But the doctrine of Christ crucified for the salvation of sinners is certainly a fundamental doctrine, and without a belief of this a Christian church cannot exist. The gospel is a discovery of salvation as purchased by, and attainable through a divinely appointed Redeemer. If we reject this discovery, we reject the very marrow—the essence of the gospel; and with no propriety can we call ourselves Christians. Accordingly we find, that they, who in the apostles' times, joined themselves to the church, were required to profess their belief, that Jesus was the Christ, and that God raised him from the dead. They who denied that Jesus was come in the flesh, were called antichrists; but all, who in every place called on the name of Jesus Christ, were considered as belonging to his church. And when Christians appeared to be well united in this grand and leading point, the apostles advised them to great condescension and tenderness in differences of smaller importance.

We have no right to exclude any Christian, or society of Christians, from our charity and communion, for supposed errors, as long as those errors appear not to respect the foundation on which the church stands. If we reject another for an error, which we suppose not to be essential, we reject him, whom yet, we believe,

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God has received, and thus exalt ourselves above God. And if we make those things fundamental in religion, which the gospel has not made so, we then attempt to lay other foundations, besides that which God has laid, presumptuously intruding into his place. "Let no man, therefore, judge, or set at nought his brother, for we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ."

The Apostle here teaches us in the plainest manner, that the church of God, both before and since the coming of Christ, is one and the same in its foundation and structure, though different in some less important circumstances. He says, "Ye are built on the foundation of the *apostles* and *prophets*." These both form one continued foundation, whose parts are all united in the same corner stone, Jesus Christ. Accordingly the apostles, in their descriptions of the Christian church, refer expressly to the covenant made with Abraham, and to the predictions and promises contained in the books of the prophets.

Hence we see the great mistake of those, who, to evade the force of all arguments from the Old Testament, for applying the seal of the covenant to the infant seed of believers, allege that the Christian church is on a foundation entirely different from that of the ancient church; for the Apostle expressly instructs us, that the Christian church is no other than the ancient church continued, and that the foundation has always been the same. I proceed to observe,

III. The Apostle here teaches us, that this spiritual house must be *united with*, and *framed into* the foundation. Thus it may stand secure. "Christ is the chief corner stone, *in which* all the building is *framed*."

A house, in order to its stability, must be joined to, and rest upon its foundation; so we must be united to, and built upon the Saviour. That only is true faith in Christ, which regards him as the foundation of our present hope, and final acceptance. "Other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus

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Christ. And let every man take heed how he buildeth thereon." The building must be made with precious stones; not with hay and stubble. We are to build ourselves up on a holy faith, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life." There is, indeed, a sort of reliance on Christ, which is not faith, but presumption. To depend on him for salvation, while we continue in impenitence and disobedience, is to make void the law through faith: This is as contrary to the gospel, as to depend on our own works, without regarding the Saviour at all. It is building a superstructure; not with precious stones, but with vile rubbish. What Christ has done for us, is the sole ground of our acceptance. In this respect we must rest on him only, and have no confidence in ourselves. But then it is only in a way of repentance and new obedience, that we become qualified and prepared for eternal life. True faith, therefore, relies upon him in this way; and while it trusts in his righteousness, it loves his character, chooses his precepts and submits to his government. There must be a conformity to Christ, as well as a confidence in him. God has predestinated believers to be conformed to the image of his Son. He is a living stone, chosen of God, and precious; and they, as lively stones, are built on him a spiritual house, to offer sacrifices acceptable to God. To judge whether we are united to the Saviour, we must inquire, as well whether we are conformed to him, as whether we trust in him. "He who is joined to the Lord is one Spirit."

IV. As the spiritual house must rest on the foundation, so the several parts of it must be *framed* and *inserted into each other*. The Apostle says, "In Christ all the building *fitly framed together*, groweth into an holy temple"—"Ye are *builded together* for an habitation of God."

As it is faith which fixes the saints on Christ the foundation, so it is *love* which binds them together

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among themselves. "The whole body joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase to the edifying of itself in *love*."

If in a building, a stone gets loose, a joint breaks, or a stick or timber becomes apparently rotten, repairs must soon be made; for there is such a dependence of one part on another, that when one gives way, the whole is threatened with ruin. So it is in the house of God: When contention or division begins, however small it may seem at first, there is danger of general confusion. The breach, if neglected, naturally widens and enlarges. If, therefore, we would preserve the beauty, strength and dignity of the spiritual house, we must be watchful to repair breaches, as soon as they appear, and to remove those materials which are become too corrupt to be repaired, lest they communicate their own corruption to sounder parts. A house, thus built on the firm foundation which the gospel describes, and fitly framed together in every part, will stand secure against those winds and tempests, which break and demolish some other structures, thrown up in haste, reared without a solid foundation, composed of heterogeneous materials, and framed without proportion of parts. "God has laid in Zion a precious corner stone: and he that believeth, shall not be confounded.

V. The Apostle describes this spiritual house, as "growing unto an holy temple in the Lord, and becoming an habitation of God through the Spirit."

We must not content ourselves with having built on the true foundation, but must bring the structure to a more finished and beautiful condition.

The church may grow and make increase, both by the progress of its present members, in knowledge and holiness, and by the addition of new members, who become fellow workers in the spiritual building. We

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should, therefore, be fervent in spirit, serving the Lord, and abounding in every good work; and we should be zealous to promote knowledge and righteousness among others, to convert sinners from the error of their ways, and to encourage those who would enter into the kingdom of God.

The church is to *grow* into an *holy* temple. As, in the best Christians, so in the purest churches on earth, there is much imperfection; but *increasing* holiness should be the aim of all. Private Christians should be diligent to grow in grace, and in the knowledge of the Saviour. Churches should maintain the worship and ordinances of Christ's house, and unite in the steady observance of them for the common edification; not forsake the assembling of themselves together, but exhort and animate one another, to love and good works. The spiritual house is built up, that Christians, as a holy priesthood, may offer spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Churches should become "an habitation of God through the Spirit." God's presence fills the universe, but he dwells in a peculiar manner, in the churches where the saints meet together for his worship and service. "The Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation; this is his rest forever, here will he dwell." He dwells here, not only by his word and ordinances, but also by the influence of his Spirit, which he affords to assist his people in the duties of his worship, and to open their hearts for the reception of his word. The gospel is therefore called a ministration of the Spirit."

If we would have the Spirit, we must be *builded together* for an habitation of God—we must be united in a church state, so as to enjoy his word and ordinances—we must attend upon them in the appointed seasons—we must preserve peace and order among ourselves. Thus we shall grow into a temple for God—thus we

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shall be builded together for an habitation of the Spirit.

Vain then is it to expect, that we shall enjoy the special presence of the Spirit, if, instead of being builded together, we are broken asunder and scattered abroad—if, instead of growing into an holy temple, we neglect the assembling of ourselves together—if, instead of attending on the word of God, we put it far from us—if, instead of walking in peace and love, and cooperating for the common edification, we oppose and contend with one another, and thus destroy the unity and symmetry of God's family; for thus we resist and vex the Holy Spirit.

God has promised his Spirit to them who seek it. The manner in which we are to seek it, he has prescribed. Our seeking will be successful, when it is guided by his prescription. He is a God of peace and order—of grace and love. We are only then a fit habitation of God through the Spirit, when we preserve peace and order, condescension and charity among ourselves.

Let us, therefore, as parts of God's spiritual house, be united together by love, as well as joined to the foundation by faith. Let us consecrate ourselves, and all that we have, to God, considering that we are called to be an holy priesthood to him. Let us constantly and devoutly attend the stated worship of his temple; avoid whatever would disturb the harmony, or mar the beauty of the spiritual building; endeavor to grow ourselves, and to promote the growth of others, in knowledge and righteousness; be builded together for a divine habitation; and rejoice in all those means, which God has appointed for the perfecting of the saints, and for the edifying of the body of Christ.

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# SERMON XVI.

## *The Mystery of the Gospel Revealed to the Apostles for the general benefit of Mankind.*

EPHESIANS iii. 1—7.

*For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles; if ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God, which is given to you ward, how that by revelation he made known to me the mystery, (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ) which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy Apostles and Prophets by the Spirit of God, that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel; whereof I am made a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me, by the effectual working of his power.*

THE calling of the Gentiles into the church of God, which is a subject of the preceding chapter, is still continued in this. Concerning this wonderful event, Paul says "he had written before in few words," or had written *a little before*, i. e. in the preceding part of this epistle, by attending to which they might perceive, how well he understood the mystery, which by revelation God had opened to him.

The mystery here intended is the calling of the Gentiles to a participation with the Jews in the privil-

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ages of God's church. This mystery was in ages past unknown to the sons of men, but was now revealed by the Spirit to the Apostles and Prophets, that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs of the same body, and partakers of the *promise* by the gospel. The promise referred to, is that great promise made to Abraham, "I will be a God to thee and to thy seed." The Gentiles were now called to be partakers of this promise with the Jews. "This blessing of Abraham is come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ."—"They who are Christ's are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise."—"As many as are of the faith are blessed with faithful Abraham."

The incorporation of Jews and Gentiles into one church was not, in former ages, *wholly* unknown; for the promise to Abraham was, "that in his seed *all the nations* of the earth should be blessed." The introduction of the gospel and its glorious success among the Gentiles were often foretold by the prophets. But so imperfectly was this matter understood by the generality of the Jews, that the Apostle says, "In former ages it was not made known to the sons of men, as it is now revealed."

The Jews, who received the gospel, retained for some time the same prejudice against the Gentiles, as they had entertained before. They imagined, that the way into the church of God was still through the legal ceremonies; and that no Heathens could be admitted to the privileges of the gospel, unless they first became Jews by circumcision. But the Apostle says, "Christ has abolished the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances." The Gentiles are made heirs of the same body with the Jews, not by the works of the law of Moses, but by the faith of the gospel of Christ.

The abolition of the ancient distinction between Jews and Gentiles, and their incorporation into one church, have fallen under our consideration in some



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preceding discourses on this epistle. We shall therefore notice, in the passage now read, such matters only, as have not occurred before.

I. The first thing observable is, that Paul calls himself "a prisoner of Christ for the Gentiles."

The liberality of his sentiments toward them, and the boldness with which he asserted their title to equal privileges with Jews, were the principal reasons, why the latter persecuted him with such violence, and caused him to be sent a prisoner to Rome. It was while he was there in bonds, that he wrote this epistle. He might, therefore, with propriety call himself a "prisoner of Christ for the Gentiles. A remarkable instance of the prejudice of the Jews against him on this account is related in the 22d chapter of the Acts. In making his defence before them, he declares the manner and circumstances of his conversion, and the particular instructions given him from heaven to depart from Jerusalem, and preach the gospel among the Gentiles: "and when they heard this word, they lifted up their voices and said, *Away with such a fellow from the earth for it is not fit that he should live;* and they cast off their clothes, and threw dust into the air," in token of their abhorrence of such a doctrine.

It may seem strange, that men should possess such malignity of heart, as to envy their fellow mortals the means and offers of salvation. But perhaps this temper, which the Jews so remarkably discovered, may sometimes be found among Christians.

You will all say, "We never envied a man on religious accounts. We wish all men virtuous in this world and happy in the next." But be pleased to examine yourselves. Have you never envied a good man the reputation which resulted from his virtue? Have you never tried to detract from his superior honor, or to cast dirt on his fair character? Have you never felt uneasy when you heard him commended, or enjoyed a

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secret pleasure when ill things have been spoken of him.

The spring of this bitter enmity in the Jews was their spiritual pride and worldly affection. They imagined, that they were God's favorites, and that for them were designed the honors of this world, and the glories of the world to come. The Gentiles they viewed as reprobates, and they esteemed it a virtue to hate those whom God had rejected. They considered Paul, in his labors for the conversion of Heathens, as opposing their darling system of universal dominion under the Messiah's reign: Hence they condemned him as an enemy to their religion and government.

Wherever the same spirit of pride and selfishness reigns, it still produces similar effects. How common is it, that particular sects of Christians confine salvation to themselves, and not only reprobate all others, but even condemn the charity of the man who dares to hope favorably of them? How common is it, that men excuse, in their own party, the same things which they severely censure in another; and consider those actions as vices in a rival sect, which they magnify as virtues in themselves and their proselytes? How common is it, that Christians, so called; yea, even Preachers, under the solemn pretence of promoting the religion of Christ, and saving the souls of sinners, sow discord among brethren, cause divisions in Churches, and disturb that peace which is an essential virtue of the gospel, and without which religion cannot exist? How common is it, that we envy those in superior worldly circumstances—that we wish to depress them—that we eagerly receive and diligently propagate ill reports concerning them? Whence proceeds this unfriendly, unsocial conduct, but from pride and a love of the world? Is not this the same temper which appeared in the Jews, when they made Paul a prisoner for teaching, that the Gentiles were entitled to equal privileges with them?

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We see, then, that liberality of sentiment essentially belongs to true religion; and that bigotry, hatred and envy among Christians debase their character, and scandalize their profession. We should entertain exalted thoughts of the divine goodness: Such thoughts enlarge the mind and liberalize the feelings. We should consider the whole human race as the care of God's Providence; and remember, that, while they partake of *his* kindness, they deserve not *our* hatred. We should look on our fellow men as sharers in the same nature, subject to the same sensations, and capable of the same happiness with ourselves; and ever be disposed to do to them, as we desire they should do to us. We should ever entertain favorable sentiments, where nothing appears to forbid them. While we are industrious to promote piety, correct error, and convert sinners, we should be careful that our zeal urge us not to measures inconsistent with peace and charity, and subversive of order and religion. While we are concerned to rectify mistaken sentiments, and reform irregular manners in others, we must ourselves be open to conviction and patient of reproof. While we attempt to wipe the mote out of a brother's eye, we must consider that the eye is tender and sensible; we must touch it with a gentle hand, lest we irritate and enflame the part, which we pretend to relieve. We should suffer no worldly motives to control us in our religious conduct; but act under a solemn sense of that amazing futurity which awaits us and all the human race. If we are governed in our religion by worldly ends, we shall hate and malign those who differ from us, just for the same reason, that a man of avarice or ambition, hates his competitors in trade, or his rivals for preferment. But if our minds are deeply impressed with a sense of God's supreme government and impartial judgment, we shall be chiefly solicitous to approve ourselves to him; we shall rejoice when we see religion prevail among our fellow sinners, whoever

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they are; we shall be pleased with the appearance of real virtue and piety in those, who may not in all points think with us; we shall choose to hope the best we can of doubtful characters; we shall be more ready to condemn our own real faults, than to censure the suspected faults of our brethren. We shall not imitate the men of the world, who endeavor to pull down a competitor, that they may rise on his ruins; but shall imitate the liberal spirit of the Apostles, who labored to build up, in every place, the common interest of Christ's kingdom. True religion is pure and peaceable: It rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth: It envies not, nor behaves itself unseemly: It believes all things, and hopes all things. I proceed to observe, secondly,

*II.* The gospel is "a dispensation of the grace of God." So the Apostle here calls it.

It is a discovery of that method, which the wisdom of God has chosen for dispensing his grace and merey toward fallen men, in order to their recovery from sin and death, and their final salvation in heaven. It is called *the gospel of God*, as it originated in his good pleasure; and *the gospel of Christ*, as he is the immediate author of it, and as his doctrines and works, his life and death, his resurrection and ascension, and the blessings procured by him, are the subjects on which it principally treats. It is called *the word of salvation*, as it proclaims the offers, and states the terms of salvation; and *the gospel of peace*, as it discovers the way in which sinners may be reconciled to God, and obtain peace with him. It is said to be *the power of God to salvation*, because, while it brings salvation, it proposes the most powerful motives to persuade, and assistances to encourage sinners to accept it. It is called *the gospel of the grace of God*, because it proceeds from his self moving goodness, and manifests his abundant mercy to sinful creatures; and *the dispensa-*

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*tion of his grace*, because it opens the way in which sinners may become partakers of his grace.

The grace which the gospel offers is pardon and glory. This grace is offered without distinction, to one as well as another, in the same way, and on the same terms. It is dispensed through the Redeemer, who gave himself a ransom for sinners. The terms of pardon are repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. Sinners are brought to a compliance with these terms by means of the gospel, which is rendered effectual by the attendant operations of the Spirit. The Apostle says, "The gospel is the power of God to salvation to every one that believeth, for therein the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith, and the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." He speaks of his preaching, as mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds, to the humbling of every high thing which exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and to the reducing of every thought to the obedience of Christ. He taught that men must repent and turn to God and do works meet for repentance, assuring them, that thus they should obtain the forgiveness of sins, and an inheritance among them who are sanctified, by faith in Christ. As the gospel is the word of salvation sent to a sinful race, so herein is proclaimed the forgiveness of sins, in such full and universal terms, that all who believe may be assured, that they shall be justified from all their sins, and be made heirs of eternal life.

Now if we are under such a dispensation of grace, How inexcusable are the impenitent, and how amazing will be the punishment of those who finally perish in their guilt?

The gospel supposes us to be lost and helpless; and such we certainly are. If we were not such, we should need no salvation. If we are such, how joyfully should we hear, and how thankfully embrace the

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dispensation of the grace of God? Are we unworthy creatures? How happy it is that God deals with us in a way of grace! Have we no righteousness on which to ground a claim for the remission of past sins? How happy it is, that Jesus the Son of God has made reconciliation for iniquity, and brought in everlasting righteousness! Are our sins great and numerous? How happy it is, that the righteousness of God, through the faith of Christ, is unto all, and upon all them that believe, and there is no difference! Do we feel the power of corruption, and the weakness of nature? How happy it is, that God's grace is sufficient for us, and that we may come boldly to his throne for grace to help in time of need? Do we find that the serious sentiments, and virtuous resolutions awakened in us, too easily slumber and die away? How happy it is, that God gives us line upon line, and precept upon precept!———And what—Shall we treat with cold indifference and neglect all this kind and wonderful provision?—Can we suppose, there is no danger in trampling on the gifts of divine love, and spurning the offers of eternal salvation? The Apostle has given, and let us take the warning, that "despisers of the gospel will wonder and perish."

*III.* The Apostle says, This dispensation was committed to him for the benefit of mankind. "The dispensation of the grace of God is given to you ward."

He was allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel. This was a trust committed to him by the will of God—not a power arrogated by his own presumption. "He was an Apostle not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father." And "the gospel which he preached was not after man, neither received he it of man; but was taught it by the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Few men ever possessed higher accomplishments than Paul. His natural abilities were great; his education was superior; the manner of his conversion

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was extraordinary; the grace bestowed upon him was abundant. But on neither of these grounds did he assume the work of the preacher. He waited till he was regularly called and authorized to it. He was first informed by Ananias, that he was one whom Christ had chosen to bear his name among the Gentiles. But he did not venture to act on this information, before he had evidence that it was from heaven. To prove this, Ananias performed a miracle. Paul's first ministrations were among the disciples at Damascus, who had been witnesses of the remarkable circumstances of his conversion and call. He afterwards joined himself to the Apostles. But, in order to his admission into their fraternity, he adduced competent testimony. For a while he was with them coming in, and going out at Jerusalem. Before he went forth to preach the gospel among the Gentiles, he was solemnly separated to the work by the prophets and teachers at Antioch, who fasted, and prayed, and laid their hands on him, and sent him away. Paul, being thus ordained, afterward ordained others; and he charged them to commit to faithful men the things which they had received from him.

Paul, you see, did not rely on a secret, internal call, as what alone would warrant him to commence a preacher. He carefully conformed to the order which Christ has instituted in his church. He instructed Timothy and Titus to do likewise. Ministers, then, in this day, are not to ground their warrant to preach the gospel on any *immediate* revelation. Nothing of this kind is now to be expected. If they should pretend to this, it would be no warrant for others to receive them in their assumed character, and consequently, no warrant for them to assume it, unless they can by miracles prove to the world the reality of the pretended revelation.

The gospel has pointed out the qualifications necessary for teachers of religion, and the manner in which

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they are to be inducted into office. When a man desires the office of a bishop, possesses the requisite qualifications, and is not only called thereto by the brethren, but recommended also by the elders of the church, then he is warranted to act in the character of a gospel bishop.

IV. Paul speaks of the knowledge of the gospel as communicated to him *by revelation.* "God by revelation made known to me the mystery, which, in other ages, was not made known to the sons of men, as it is now revealed to his holy Apostles and Prophets by the Spirit."

We are not to suppose, that every thing, which the Apostles preached or wrote, was communicated to them by immediate inspiration. Many things they learned from the writings of the Old Testament; and from the personal instructions of Christ. And the Spirit was sent to bring all things to their remembrance, as well as to teach them all things, which they should farther need to learn. Many of Christ's personal instructions were doubtless communicated to Paul, by those Apostles who conversed with the Lord in the days of his flesh.

In the 7th chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians, our Apostle uses such expressions as these; "I speak by *permission*—not by *commandment.*"——"*I* speak, not the *Lord.*"——"I have no *commandment*, but I give *my judgment.*" Hence some would infer, that Paul often spake only by the dictates of his own reason, and without any divine influence; so that he was in doubt himself, whether he spake agreeably to the will of God. But this certainly cannot be his meaning; for he says, "I give my judgment as one who hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful—as one that hath the Spirit of God—and the mind of Christ—and the things which I write, are the commandments of the Lord."——But he means that Christ, in his *personal* instructions, had given no deci-



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sion on the subject in question, but had left it to be determined by his Apostles under the direction of the Spirit, which was to lead them into all truth. He speaks, not by way of distinction between his own private judgment, and divine inspiration; but by way of distinction between that which was taught by the Spirit, and that which Christ taught by commandment when he was on earth. In the last verse, he says, "I think I have the Spirit of God." This is not an intimation of doubt, whether he had the Spirit; but an expression of his confidence, and an appeal to the Corinthians, that he had it; for the word should be rendered, not, *I think*, but *I appear* to have the Spirit. This appeal to them he again renews. "Am I not an Apostle?—If I am not an Apostle to others, doubtless I am to you; for the seal of mine Apostleship are ye in the Lord."—"Truly the signs of an Apostle were wrought among you in wonders and mighty deeds."

God was not at the expense of inspiration to teach Apostles those things which they knew, or might know, by other means in their hands. But where actual knowledge, and the means of obtaining it were wanting, there inspiration supplied the defect.

It is not necessary for us to know the nature of this inspiration, or the manner in which the Apostles were assured of its divinity. If we believe there is an infinite and all perfect Spirit, which possesses our reins, and even pervades universal nature, we must believe, he can reveal his will to men, by such an immediate influence, as shall carry its own evidence, and leave on the mind no possible doubt of its reality. We can speak to men in such a manner, that they shall certainly know we speak to them, and shall perfectly understand our meaning. If we deny the possibility of a certain inspiration from God, we deny that power to him, which we ourselves possess. But,

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V. Whatever might be the manner in which the Apostles knew their own inspiration, the manner in which they proved it to others is taught in our text. This was by the power of miracles. St. Paul says, "I am made a minister of the gospel according to the gift of the grace of God by the effectual working of his power." To this evidence he often appeals for the truth of his Apostleship, and the divinity of his doctrine.

When God gives a revelation he gives sufficient demonstration that it is from him. Otherwise it could have no authority with rational and inquiring minds. He gave the dispensation of grace to the Apostles, that they might communicate it to the world; and he endowed them with the power of miracles, that their word might be received as divine, and might work effectually in them who heard it.

How wonderful is the love of God! We see his goodness in the common course of his Providence; but more gloriously is his mercy displayed in the gospel, which opens a marvellous plan for the salvation of sinners. This plan was communicated to the Apostles by the inspiration of his Spirit, and confirmed by divers miracles according to his will.

What reverence is due to the sacred scriptures, which have been thus authenticated by a divine seal?

If God has been at such expense to give us a revelation, and to convince us of its authority, we ought to receive it with unwavering confidence, and to obey it with unreserved submission.

What we there find expressly taught and commanded, that let us believe and obey, how much soever it might have baffled the invention, or now surpasses the comprehension of human reason. We are not to believe without a reason for our faith, nor to act without a reason for our conduct; but we are bound to believe what God reveals, and to do what he commands, when we have evidence, that the command or revelation is

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from him, even though the reason of the command should be unknown, or the matter revealed should be incomprehensible to us.

How absurd is it to imagine, that God will communicate to men, by inspiration, the knowledge of religion, since this may be obtained from the standing revelation which he has given us? The scriptures are able to make us wise to salvation, and to furnish us unto every good work. If neglecting these, we expect that religious knowledge will be communicated to us in a cheaper and easier way, we insult the divine goodness, and expose ourselves to fatal delusions. Even in the days of the Apostles, God was not lavish of inspiration. He did not endow men immediately with that knowledge, which might be acquired by ordinary means. Cornelius was directed by a vision to send for Peter, who should teach him words, by which he might be saved. God could as easily have revealed to Cornelius the things by which he should be saved, as send an angel to inform him, where he might find an instructor. But God will honor his own institutions; and where these are sufficient, he will not supersede them by higher and more extraordinary measures.

Christians are dependent on, and indebted to a holy, divine influence in the religious life; but this ordinary influence of the Spirit does not immediately reveal to them new truths; it rather disposes their minds to regard and obey the truths already revealed. We are never, therefore, to follow implicitly an impression made on our minds; much less the impressions, which others pretend have been made on theirs; but we are to examine, by the word of God, every suggestion which is started within us, or communicated to us, and to obey or reject it, as it agrees, or disagrees with this standard. "Believe not every Spirit, but try the Spirits." The scripture is to be our guide. The suggestions, or excitations of the Spirit are not to im-

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part to us the knowledge of duty, but to awaken our attention to duty already taught.

"Despise not prophesying;" or the stated preaching of the word. God has committed the dispensation of grace to his servants, that they may open and recommend it to others. If you would have the benefit of it, attend upon it in God's appointed way. In vain do you expect his grace, while you neglect the means, by which he is wont to communicate it. This is the voice of wisdom, "To you, O men, I call, and my voice is to the sons of men. Blessed is the man that heareth me, watching daily at my gates, and waiting at the posts of my doors. Whoso findeth me, findeth life, and shall obtain favor of the Lord; but he that sinneth against me, wrongeth his own soul. All who hate me, love death."

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# SERMON XVII.

## *The unsearchable Riches of Christ, preached for the instruction of Men.*

EPHESIANS iii. 8, 9, 10.

*Unto me, who am less than the least of all Saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which, from the beginning of the world, hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ; to the intent, that now unto principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God.*

IN the preceding verse the Apostle says, "He was made a minister according to the gift of the grace bestowed on him by the effectual working of God's power." The mention of his apostolic office awakens humble reflections on his past guilty life, and admiring thoughts of God's grace in employing him to preach the grand mysteries of the gospel for the instruction of men on earth, and even of angels in heaven.

The words read will lead us to contemplate the Apostle's deep sense of his unworthiness—his admiring apprehension, of God's grace—his elevated sentiments of the gospel—and his enlarged views of the design of his ministry.

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I. We are to consider what a *humble opinion* the Apostle had of himself. "To me, who am *less than the least of all saints*, is this grace given.

In his abilities and gifts, he was not a whit behind the chiefest Apostles; and in sufferings he was more frequent, and in labors more abundant than they all. But in respect of *worthiness*, he esteemed them his superiors; for they had not, like him, persecuted the church, and they were in Christ, and became Apostles before him. Of himself he says, "Last of all, Christ was seen of me, as of one born out of due time; for I am the least of the Apostles, who am not meet to be called an Apostle, because I persecuted the church of God."

Good Christians in honor prefer one another, and esteem others better than themselves. They are more conversant, and better acquainted with themselves, than they can be with others. Their sins come nearer their hearts, and effect them more sensibly, than the sins of others can do. They are more disposed to extenuate and excuse the failings of their brethren, than their own; for their charity hopes all things, and can cover a multitude of sins.

True religion in the heart will produce selfabasing thoughts. If you see a man ostentatious of his religious experiences and godly works, and at the same time censorious of others, and disposed to exclude them from his fellowship, you may strongly suspect, that he has never felt the power of the gospel on his heart.

The true convert forgets not his *former* character. Paul calls himself the least of saints, because he had persecuted the church. The penitent reflects often on his past guilty life, that he may be more humble in himself, more thankful to God, more watchful against sin, more diligent in the practice of religion, and thus may make more suitable returns for God's abundant grace.

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The penitent not only remembers former iniquities, but as far as they have been public, *confesses* them before men. The Apostle in his sermons and epistles, often laments the errors of his past life, that thus he may repair the injuries which he had done to the cause of Christ. When David fell under the power of conviction, he not only condemned himself in the presence of his reprover, but composed a penitential psalm, which he delivered to the Jewish church, as a standing confession of his guilt and warning to others. He prays "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and deliver me from blood—then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee."

II. The Apostle expresses his *admiring apprehensions* of God's *grace* in *calling* him to the ministry. "I am made a minister according to the *grace of God.* To me is *this grace* given, that I should preach Christ among the Gentiles. By the *grace* of God I am what I am."

To the same grace which had called him, he ascribes all his *qualifications* for the ministry. "Christ hath *enabled*," or qualified, "me, putting me into the ministry." "I am made a minister according to the working of God's power." "Our *sufficiency* is of *God*, who hath made us able ministers of the new Testament."

To God also he gives the honor of his *success* in the ministry. "For," says he, "neither is he who planteth, nor he who watereth, any thing, but God who giveth the increase." It was matter of wonder and thankfulness to him, that God should honor so unworthy a man with so high an office, with such eminent gifts, and with such distinguished usefulness. He gloried in his infirmities, that the power of Christ might rest upon him.

We see that the gospel ministry is a respectable office. However contemptible some render themselves in it, the office itself is honorable. The Apostle di-

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rects that the elders who rule well, especially they who labor in word and doctrine, should be esteemed highly in love for their work's sake; and be counted worthy of double honor. They are ambassadors of God to beseech men to be reconciled to him. They are stewards of the manifold grace of God. They are servants to men for Christ's sake. They are heralds sent forth to proclaim the tidings of salvation to a fallen race. A sense of the dignity and importance of their office should warm their zeal in the discharge of it. We proceed to consider,

III. The Apostle's *elevated sentiments* concerning the *gospel* which he preached. He calls it "the *unsearchable riches* of Christ."

The blessings of the gospel, being purchased by the blood of Christ are called *his* riches. "He, who was rich, for our sakes became poor, that through his poverty we might be rich."

They are called *riches* on account of their excellency, fulness and variety. They surpass in value all the treasures of the world; they are offered in such abundance as to supply all our wants, and dispensed in such manner as is suited to all our necessities. Christians, how poor soever in this world, still are rich. They are heirs of a kingdom, and entitled to the riches of the glory of an inheritance in heaven. They will inherit all things. The Apostle says to the Corinthians, "Now ye are full, ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings." Of himself and his brethren he says, "We are poor, yet make many rich; we have nothing, and yet possess all things."

The riches of Christ are called *unsearchable* riches. They are undiscoverable by human reason, and made known only by revelation. Hence they are called *mysteries*. The Apostle says, He was sent "to make all men *see* what was the *mystery*, which from the beginning of the world had been hid in God, *who created all things by Jesus Christ.*" This is the sub-



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stance of the gospel mystery, that as all things were made by Christ, so the government of them is put into his hands—that he has opened a way in which God's rebellious subjects, in this part of the creation, may be restored to favor—that he is ordained head over all things for the church—that he gives laws and annexes their sanctions—that he will finally dispense rewards and punishments to different characters, and then will give up the kingdom to the Father.

As the riches of Christ were unsearchable to reason, so they were but imperfectly made known in the prophetic revelation. Alluding to the words of Isaiah, the Apostle says, "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him; but God hath revealed them to us by his Spirit; for the Spirit searcheth all things; yea, the deep things of God." One part of the mystery of Godliness was, "that Christ should be preached to the Gentiles." Of this the Jews had no apprehension. To the Apostles themselves it was matter of admiration, that "God had granted to the *Gentiles*, repentance unto life." It was "by revelation" that "God made known to Paul the *mystery*, which in other ages had not been made known to the sons of men; that the *Gentiles* should be fellow heirs, and of the same body" with the Jews, "and partakers" with them "of his promise in Christ by the gospel."

The riches of Christ are of *inestimable value*. They are such as could not be purchased by silver and gold. His own precious blood was the only adequate price for them. He has taught us, that worlds could not redeem one soul that is lost. Who then can conceive the worth of that redemption, which is sufficient for all sinners, and will be applied to all who penitently and thankfully accept it?

In Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge—all the riches of grace and mercy. "God

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grant us, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man, that we may "discern something of his manifold wisdom, and may, according to the measure of saints, "be able to comprehend what is the length, and breadth, and height, and depth, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge."

What abundant cause of joy and gratitude have we, who by nature are sinners of the Gentiles, that we have been called to partake of these unsearchable riches? With what pleasure should we read—with what transport should we hear the gospel of our salvation? This discovers to us wonders which human reason could not have searched out, and proclaims to us blessings which human virtue could never have secured.

Ye sons of poverty and want; go take a share in these unsearchable riches. Vain are worldly treasures, and worldly pursuits. No longer spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which cannot satisfy; but eat that which is good, and let your souls delight in fatness. Seek durable and substantial riches—seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness. "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hid in a field, which, when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof, goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field." Go, make this purchase, and you will at once possess unsearchable riches.

Let us now,

IV. Consider what *grand* and *enlarged* conceptions the Apostle entertained of the *design* and *importance* of his ministry.

The primary and immediate object of it, he tells us, was to make *all men* see what is the fellowship of the mystery which was hidden from ages." It was to open to mankind that mighty scheme, which the wisdom of God had formed, and which his goodness had, for ages, been carrying into execution for the redemp-

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tion of our fallen race. When Jesus first appeared unto Paul, he said to him, "I will make thee a minister, and a witness of the things which thou hast seen, and in which I shall appear to thee; and I will send thee to the people and to the Gentiles, to open their eyes, and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God." To this heavenly vision Paul was not disobedient, but shewed to all men among whom he preached, "that they must repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance." The great theme of his preaching was the salvation of sinners through Christ, in a way of repentance. He preached Christ the Saviour, not of Jews only but of Gentiles also—of all who believe, whatever might be their character, condition or nation.

The manner of his preaching was *plain* and *familiar*. He preached the *unsearchable* riches of Christ, with an intent that all men might *see* and *know* them.

His preaching tended to *peace* and *union*. It was not his object to form parties here and there, under different names, but to bring all, whether Jews or Gentiles, into one body, and into fellowship one with another. He taught all Christians, in every place, to consider themselves as citizens of one great community, subjects of one common Lord, partakers of the same privileges, heirs of the same inheritance, and to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. How different was our Apostle from those misguided zealots, who interrupt the fellowship of Christians, and sow discord among brethren by teaching their partizans to say to others, "Stand by yourselves, come not near to us, for we are holier than you!"—"Mark them who cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have received, and avoid them: For they who are such serve not the Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly."

Paul's ministry was designed for the benefit, not of men only, but of *angels* too. He preached the un-

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searchable riches of Christ, "That now unto *principalities* and *powers* in *heavenly places*, might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God."

The angels learn much of the wisdom of God from his works. When he laid the foundations of the earth, "they sang together and shouted for joy." And still they praise him, ascribing to him glory, honor and power, because he has created all things, and for his pleasure they are, and were created." If from these works they learn God's character, they doubtless understand it more perfectly from the dispensation of his grace to fallen men. Into this they desire to look; for in this his wisdom, holiness, mercy and truth are most gloriously displayed. They were sent to foretel the birth of the Saviour, and of John, his forerunner. When the Redeemer was born, they came to notify the happy event to the shepherds in the field; and on this occasion they glorified God in anthems of praise. They attended Jesus in his temptations, and strengthened him in his sufferings. They watched his sepulchre while he slept, opened it when he arose, and conveyed the tidings of his resurrection to his anxious friends. They were present at his ascension, and testified to his disciples his entrance into his glory. They are all ministering Spirits, sent forth to minister to them who shall be heirs of salvation. They aided the primitive preachers in their labors and protected them in their dangers. They visited, and still they visit the worshipping assemblies of Christians to observe what passes there. Hence Paul enjoins on Christians a decent deportment in the house of prayer, "because of the angels." And hence he charges ministers, "in the presence of the elect angels," to be faithful in their office.

Now if angels were present in the churches when first the gospel was preached, they learnt more of God's manifold wisdom, than ever they had known before. The mystery of divine grace to guilty men

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was unsearchable to angels, till it was revealed by the Spirit to the Apostles, and by them opened and proclaimed to the world. They had before seen the wisdom, power and goodness of God in creation and providence; but the display of his manifold wisdom, and of his abundant grace in the redemption of men by the incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection of his Son, opened a new scene of wonders, and afforded new themes of praise. Now they beheld *that*, which before they had never seen, and but imperfectly conceived, the Son of God assuming humanity, dying for the guilty, rising from the grave, ascending to glory, shedding down the Spirit, commissioning Apostles, and sending them forth to proclaim pardon and life to the chief of sinners. Accordingly in the revelation, they are said to sing a *new* song; not only the song of *Moses*, which they had been used to sing; *Thou art worthy to receive glory, for thou hast created all things*; but also the song of the *Lamb: Thou art worthy to receive blessing and praise, for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood.*—Though they are not the immediate subjects of this redemption, having kept their first state, yet they join in the song of Saints, who have been redeemed from the earth. Such is their benevolence—such their joy for the redemption of fallen men—such their admiration of God's new discovered grace to sinners, that they take into their own mouths the song of saints; "Thou wast slain and hast redeemed *us* by thy blood." The Apostle adds, "I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne, saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and honor, and glory, and blessing." And every creature joined in the anthem, saying, "Blessing, and honor, and glory, and power be unto him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb forever and ever."

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## REFLECTIONS.

1. This subject may serve to enlarge our views of the divine government. The gospel dispensation, which immediately concerns the human race, answers some important purposes to other intelligences. 'All the ways, in which angels might be benefited by it, we are unable to conceive. But that hereby their knowledge and admiration of God's wisdom, grace and holiness are increased, and consequently their devotion, love and felicity are exalted, we are expressly taught.'

2. This subject suggests to us, that heaven is a place of improvement. The angels still are learners. They learned much by the publication of the gospel; and new wonders in the course of providence are opening to their view. In the prophetic book of the Revelation we find them, from time to time, breaking forth into fresh admiration and praise on every new dispensation of mercy toward the church.

The saints here below are exhorted to grow in knowledge and grace. Whatever advances they make, they are still imperfect. When they arrive at heaven, they are said to be made perfect, as being wholly freed from sin. But they are not so perfect in holiness, but that there is room for improvement. If angels grow in knowledge, so may saints. They will receive farther advancement at the resurrection. But even then they will not have reached the summit of created perfection. They may, like angels, be ever learning, ever meeting new objects of wonder, and new occasions of praise, as they trace the ways, and converse with the works of God.

3. We see the *humility* of angels. They are superior beings, exalted to heavenly places, and called principalities and powers; yet they disdain not to learn from the church on earth the manifold wisdom of God. Yea, they are willingly employed as ministering spir-

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its to men. From their example let us learn humility and charity. If we hope to dwell with angels above, let us cultivate that temper which is their happiness and glory. Let us learn more of the wisdom of God, nor think it dishonorable to learn wisdom from inferiors. Let us condescend to men of low estate, and bear the infirmities of the weak. For this we have a more engaging example than that of angels, even the example of the Son of God, who came not to be ministered unto," but to minister. He was among his disciples, as one who served. He gave them a pattern of meekness, humility and love, that they should do to one another, as he had done to them.

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# SERMON XVIII.

## *Freedom of Access to God by Faith in Christ.*

EPHESIANS iii. 11, 12, 13.

*——According to his eternal purpose, which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him. Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.*

THE Apostle here resumes a thought, which he had mentioned several times before, that the admission of the Gentiles to a participation in the privileges of the gospel was according to the eternal purpose, which God had made in Christ Jesus. The extension of the church of God to comprehend all nations, was not a new design; it was a plan which divine wisdom had formed before the world was made. Though it was a mystery once unknown, and still hardly credible to the Jews, yet intimations had been given of it in prophecy, and dispositions had been made toward it in Providence, through all preceding ages of the world. The promise of a Saviour to fallen Adam respected his posterity, as well as himself; and as he was the head of the human race, it extended alike to all men. The promise to the patriarchs was more explicit; that "in their seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed." Under the Jewish dispensation, the Saviour



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was typified in sacred persons and religious ceremonies, and foretold in the preaching and writings of the prophets, who sometimes expressly described him, as coming "to bring salvation to the ends of the earth." The frequent dispersions and captivities of the Jews conveyed to other nations a knowledge of their religion, of their prophetic writings, and of their promised Messiah, and raised in the minds of inquisitive Heathens an expectation of this wonderful person. But the full discovery of this divine scheme was not made, until after Christ's resurrection, when he commanded his Apostles to go into all the world, and preach his gospel to all nations. Nor does it seem to have been perfectly understood, even by the Apostles themselves, until Peter, by a heavenly vision, was directed to go and preach the gospel to the family of the Roman centurion, Cornelius. After Peter had executed this mission, finding some of his brethren dissatisfied with his conduct, he explained to them the reasons of it, and informed them of the success which had attended it; And, on hearing of these things, "they glorified God, saying, Then hath God granted to the Gentiles also repentance unto life."

To impress the minds of the Ephesians with a deeper sense of their indebtedness to the sovereign grace of God, the Apostle often repeats this thought, that the offer of salvation, now brought to them by the gospel of Christ, was not the fruit of their works, intentions or desires, but the result of God's eternal purpose in his Son, and the effect of those disposals which he had been making from the beginning of the world. "God was found of them who sought him not, and made manifest to them who inquired not after him."

There was nothing which more filled the mind of this Apostle, and which he more frequently inculcated on Christians, than the freeness, extent, sovereignty and glory of God's grace in the salvation of sinners.

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The more we feel and realize our dependence on divine grace, the more thankfully shall we receive it, and the more diligently shall we improve it; the more humble shall we be in our opinion of ourselves, and the more charitable in our disposition toward others; the more watchful to abstain from evil, and the more zealous to abound in every good work.

One great and wonderful privilege, which the grace of God has bestowed on us, is particularly mentioned in our text. "In Christ we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him."

To this privilege we will now attend.

I. The Apostle says, "We have *access*." The word signifies an approach to some object. Here it intends a near approach to God in the duties of worship; or such a state of peace with God as allows a freedom of intercourse. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, and access to that grace in which we stand." This access is expressed by our "coming to the throne of grace"—by our "entering into the most holy place"—by our "having a hope by which we draw nigh to God."

These phrases allude to the Jewish worship. There was a visible symbol of God's presence, which attended the Israelites in the wilderness. This was called the glory of the Lord, and, sometimes, the Lord himself. When the tabernacle was erected and the ark of the covenant placed therein, this symbol took its residence on the mercy seat which was made on the ark, and between the Cherubims which covered the mercy seat. And the worshippers were said to come near to God, because they came near to that sensible token of his majesty and glory. The gracious presence of God is as really afforded now, as it was then, although there is not the same visible symbol; and, therefore, we may, as truly as the ancient Jews, be said to draw near to God, when we engage in the solemn duties of worship. Yea, the Apostle signifies, that we have

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nearer access than they, because now the way into the holiest is made manifest, into which we have liberty to enter by the blood of Christ.

These phrases have also a foundation in the customs and usages of mankind. When one, in behalf of himself or of others, would present his petition to a sovereign, he must obtain liberty of access to him: So God's allowing us to make our supplications to him, is expressed by our drawing near to him. It is a familiar manner of expression suited to convey the idea of great condescension on God's part, and high privilege on ours.

II. The Apostle observes, that "we have *boldness* of access. The word properly signifies a *freedom of speaking*, in opposition to that restraint which we feel, when we are in the presence of one whom we dread, and in whose goodness we can place no confidence.

The word expresses the *fulness* of that *liberty*, which under the gospel all Christians enjoy, of drawing near to God. The Apostle says, "We have boldness to enter into the most holy place." Under the legal dispensation, the people approached unto God by the ministration of the priests, who were appointed to offer gifts and sacrifices for them: But now all believers are "an holy priesthood to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." Under the law, the ordinary priests came only into the sanctuary: The high priest alone, and he but once a year, came within the most holy place: But, under the gospel, all Christians may at all times draw near to God in all ordinances, and may on all occasions make known their requests to him.

The word farther expresses that freedom of *spirit* with which we should come to God. The disposition of our hearts should correspond with the liberal and gracious dispensation under which we are placed.

We should come to God with a spirit of *love* in opposition to servile fear. To revere the authority,

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dread the displeasure, and tremble at the judgments of God, are tempers in no respect inconsistent with the full exercise of love. But the fear which arises from a distrust of God's mercy and goodness, and which makes us reluctant to come into his presence, is contrary to the freedom of the gospel, and to that boldness which it imparts. Love casts out this fear. And "God has not given us the spirit of fear, but the spirit of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." The charms of mercy and grace, in which our heavenly Father manifests himself to us, should awaken in our souls gratitude, hope, love, and every cheerful and devout affection.

This boldness imports *frequency* in our approaches to God. Slaves, under the influence of fear, stand at a distance from their master. Children, invited by the goodness of a father, come often into his presence. So Christians, confiding in God's fatherly care for them and attention to them, should embrace all opportunities to converse with him. Animated by a sense of the liberty allowed them, they should bring to the throne of grace their daily prayers and praises. Since they are not straitened in him, they should not be straitened in their own bowels. The pious Psalmist wished to dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of his life, that he might behold the beauty of the Lord and inquire at his temple.

How great is the privilege which Christians enjoy! They may look up to God as their Father—may go daily into his presence—may tell him all their wants—may confess before him all their sins—may solicit the greatest favors—may urge their requests with most fervent importunity; and they need not fear, that their earnestness will offend him, or their continual coming will weary him.

III. The Apostle teaches us, that "we have access *with confidence*." This confidence is what is else-

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where called a *better hope*, and the *full assurance* of faith. It is opposed to doubting and distrust.

The nature of confidence in prayer is clearly explained by the Apostle John. "If our heart condemn us not, we have confidence toward God; and whatsoever we ask we receive of him because we keep his commandments, and do those things which are pleasing in his sight. This is the confidence which we have in him, that if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us; and if we know that he heareth us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions which we desired of him."

To confidence of success in prayer it is necessary, that we "ask according to God's will"—for such things as he allows us, and in such a manner as he requires us to ask. Temporal blessings we must ask with humble submission to that supreme wisdom, which alone can judge what is best. Spiritual blessings we must solicit with the strongest importunity; but at the same time with a concern to perform the conditions on which they are offered. What God has absolutely promised he will certainly bestow. What he has promised conditionally, will follow our compliance with the conditions. The common favors of his providence will be granted in such time, manner and measure, as his wisdom sees most suitable. One may pray in faith—in a full confidence of God's power, wisdom, mercy and faithfulness, and yet feel strong doubts, whether he shall receive the blessings for which he prays; because he is jealous of his own heart, and distrustful of his own wisdom. A penitent has an undoubting reliance on God's mercy to forgive; but this reliance may be attended with a painful suspicion of the sincerity of his own repentance. A person in affliction may pray for its removal with a strong assurance of God's wisdom to discern, and readiness to do what is best; and yet he may doubt whether the removal will be granted; because he knows himself in-

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competent to judge what his own safety, the good of others and the glory of God's name may require. Confidence in prayer is a full reliance on God; but this may be accompanied with a humble diffidence of ourselves.

IV. We are farther taught, that all our hope of success in prayer must rest upon the mediation of Jesus Christ. "*In Christ* we have access with confidence, *by the faith of him.*"

In his name we are to come before God; and in the virtue of his atonement and intercession we may hope for acceptance. As the only begotten Son, he is in the bosom of the Father. As he is holy and without sin, God delights in him and hears him always. As he is perfect in knowledge, none of our wants can escape his notice. Having taken part of our flesh and blood, he is not ashamed to call us brethren. Having been tempted in all points as we are, he can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Having purchased by his blood the blessings which we need, he he can make effectual intercession. As he is a mediator ordained of God, what he has done and still is doing for us will be accepted in our behalf.

"Seeing we have such an high priest over the house of God, we may draw near with true hearts in the full assurance of faith."

The Apostle, having stated to the Ephesians their great privileges of access to the throne of grace, teaches them, what improvement they ought to make of it. "Wherefore I desire, that ye faint not at my tribulations for you."

He had before called himself "a prisoner of Christ for them" He here expresses the same thought. It was for them that he suffered his present bonds and afflictions. These were the consequences of his preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, and of his acknowledging them as fellow citizens with the Jews. Fearing, lest his sufferings in the cause of the gospel should dis-

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hearten these new and unexperienced converts, he sets before them a view of their happy security under the protection of divine grace. Dangers indeed were before them; but what had they to fear, who had boldness of access to God, with confidence by the faith of Christ? "Wherefore," says he, "I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations, *which is your glory.*"

It was one of the glories of their religion, that he who preached it was not ashamed to suffer for it. His constancy and zeal were an unequivocal evidence, that he believed his religion to be true and important, and a decided proof of its efficacy and power to support men in the severest trials. He wished them to consider, that they had not received a religion which the teachers of it were afraid to maintain; but a religion which inspired them with courage to meet, and with patience to bear every evil which the world could threaten. Though the Ephesians were exposed to the same afflictions which he endured, he desired them not to faint; for the faith which strengthened him, would sustain them; the animating principles, which the gospel afforded to him, it imparted also to them; and they, as well as he, might draw near to God with confidence, and obtain grace to help in time of need. Since they were admitted so near to God—were allowed such free intercourse with him—had such assurance of his attention to their prayers; he hoped, they would neither faint at the tribulations, which they saw in him, nor at those which might happen to them. It was their glory, that they had received the gospel, at a time when it was attended with affliction; and it would still be their greater glory, if they should hold the beginning of their confidence stedfast unto the end.

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## REFLECTIONS.

1. In the Apostle Paul we have a noble example of benevolence.

He was joyful in his tribulation, finding that it conduced to the happiness of others. He upbraids not the Ephesians with the troubles which he endured for them: He rather exhorts them to be thereby animated to constancy in the faith. He speaks, in the same kind and affectionate terms to the Philippians; "I would have you understand, that the things which happened to me, have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel. And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. It is my earnest expectation and hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed; but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or by death. If I be offered on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy and rejoice with you all. For the same cause also do ye joy and rejoice with me."

It is the glory of the religion of Jesus, that, where it comes with power, it enlarges the mind, purifies the affections, subdues the passions, sweetens the temper, softens the heart to sensibility and love, and excites to every good work.

2. We are taught that new converts should be assisted and encouraged in religion.

These Ephesians, who but lately had embraced the gospel, were in danger of fainting under the tribulations which attended it. The Apostle, therefore, warned them of the trials which they might expect, and fortified their minds by arguments adapted to their case.

They who enter on the religious life must sit down and count the cost. They must form their good res-



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olutions with an apprehension of difficulty before them —with a sense of their own weakness—and with a humble reliance on the power of divine grace. Many set out in the Christian course, with warm zeal, but with little consideration. Hence, when they meet with unlooked for opposition, they turn back and walk no more in it. As seed sown in a shallow soil suddenly springs up, but, under the scorching beams of the sun, withers away; so they who hear the word and receive it hastily, may discover much joy at first; but when tribulation arises, they are offended. They only bring forth fruit with patience, who receive the word and understand it, and so cherish it in the heart, that it takes deep root.

3. We farther learn, that our best support under the troubles of the world, is that boldness of access to God, which we enjoy in Christ Jesus. This is the argument by which the Apostle persuades the Ephesians not to faint at the sight of his tribulations, or at the apprehension of their own. As Christians have full liberty to come to God—may use great freedom of speech in his presence—may express all their desires—may ask all that they need, with a confidence that he hears and regards them; What occasion have they to faint? What danger can dismay them? What difficulty discourage them? What burden depress them? What service seem too hard for them? "When I am weak, then am I strong."—"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

4. How great a thing it is to pray as we ought—to pray in such a manner, that we can truly say, "We have had access to God?"

Do we not often ask we know not what, and pray we know not how? How much distraction is there in our devotion? How cold are our desires? How uninfluencing our sense of the Being whom we address? How often do we bring into his presence impatience, discontent, envy, ill will and other disorderly passions?

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If we have received, or think we have received an injury, How difficult it is to calm the tumult of the mind, and recover that serenity, sweetness and benevolence of heart, which are necessary to prepare us for communion with God?—How much sin is mixed with our prayers? We have need to pray, that our prayers may be forgiven.

5. Let the grace and condescension of God encourage us, unworthy as we are, to come often into his presence. He is rich in mercy to them who call upon him. Our wants are great and numerous, and he only can supply them. Let us attend to our wants, and we shall find matter for prayer—we shall know what to say when we stand before him.

How astonishing is it, that so many contentedly live strangers to God, and at a distance from him? That, absorbed in the pleasures and interests of the world, they neglect the favor of God, and the privilege of conversing with him? They who forsake him, forsake their own mercies. As for us, it is good that we should draw near to him; They who are far from him, perish.

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# SERMON XIX.

## *Saints and Angels one Family.*

EPHESIANS iii. 14, 15.

*For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.*

PAUL, in the preceding verse, expresses his desire, that the Ephesian Christians would not faint at the tribulations which *he* suffered; but rather from his example would take courage to meet all the trials and dangers, which might await them in the cause of religion. Sensible of the weakness of human nature, and its aversion to sufferings, he fears for his new converts, lest, in those persecuting times, some should renounce the faith. He therefore labors to fortify their minds by proper arguments, that they might not be moved from the hope of their calling; and prays that they might be strengthened by the grace of God to constancy and perseverance in the truth. "For this cause," saith he; i. e. because of the tribulations which attend the profession of the gospel; "I *bow my knees* unto the Father."

As "bowing the knees" was a common token of reverence in the presence of superiors, and a posture often used in prayer, to express the humility and en-

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gagedness of the mind; so the Apostle, by this phrase, intends *prayer itself:* And his meaning is, "For this cause I, with all reverence and fervor of soul, supplicate the grace of God to strengthen and confirm you in the religion which you have embraced and professed." Thus he expresses the same sentiment in his epistle to the Colossians; "For this cause we cease not to pray for you, and to desire that ye may be filled with the knowledge of God's will, strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man." The phrase suggests to us, that in our prayers for ourselves, and intercessions for others, we should bow our souls before God with deep humility, and present our petitions with collection of thought, and intenseness of desire.

The Apostle addresses the great God, as, "the Father of our *Lord Jesus Christ.*"

God is the Father of all creatures: He by his powerful word called into being those numerous worlds which are scattered through the immensity of space, and has given existence to the various tribes of creatures which inhabit them.

Mankind are God's offspring in a higher sense than inanimate and sensitive creatures: He is the Father of their Spirits, and his inspiration has given them understanding.

But in a most peculiar sense is he the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; who, in regard of his divine nature, is called the image of the invisible God, the brightness of his glory, and the similitude of his person; and, in regard of his human nature, is called the Son of God, his only begotten, and his beloved Son; because he proceeded and came forth from God in such a manner, as no other being ever has done.

The conception of Christ's human nature, and its union with the divine, though mysteries which we cannot explain, may yet be understood as far as religion is concerned in them. In general we are instructed, that Christ is the mediator between God and men,

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and that through him we must draw near to the Father. Innocent, unoffending creatures may approach him as their Father by creation. We guilty creatures must come to him through his only begotten, and well beloved Son. We must look to him, not merely as *our* Father; for we have sinned, and are no more worthy to be called his children; but especially as the Father of Jesus our Lord, who was ordained before the foundation of the world, and was manifested in these last times for us, that by him we might believe in God.

"I bow my knees unto the *Father* of our Lord Jesus Christ, *of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.*"

As the members of a family are denominated from the head, so all the faithful servants of God are represented as bearing his name. Christ says, "Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and I will write upon him *the name of my God*, and *my new name*," i. e. *the Son of God*, which name Christ had newly assumed. Under the Old Testament he was very rarely called *the Son of God*. While he appeared in the flesh, *the Son of Man*, was his usual title. After his resurrection he was seldom called any more by this name; but was styled *the Son of God*. This is therefore said to be a *new name*; and this is the name which he gives to true believers. The whole body of Christ's followers are distinguished, as having his Father's name written in their foreheads. The meaning is, they shall be denominated the *sons of God*; and in that character shall be openly and publicly received. Christ's *new name*, and the *name* of his *Father*, mean the same, even *the sons of God*; and by this name the happiness of the saints in heaven is often expressed. "God himself shall be with them, and be *their God*, and they shall be *his sons* and *daughters*. They shall be *heirs* of God, and *joint heirs* with Christ, and shall inherit all things."

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Believers on earth, and saints and angels in heaven, are all one family. They are servants of the same Lord, and children of the same parent. From him the whole family in heaven and earth is named. The saints in this world are strangers and pilgrims. They have here no continuing city. But they will soon be called home to join their brethren in the upper world. They are here training up for heaven; and when their course of discipline is finished, they will be received to those blessed mansions, which Christ has prepared, and into which those have entered who are already dead in Christ.

It may be useful to contemplate the relation between believers on earth, and saints and angels in heaven.

1. They all spring from the same common parent. They have all one father; one God has created them. Angels are an order of beings superior to men; they are endued with larger powers, and raised to higher glory: But still they are dependent creatures. They owe their existence, their powers, and all their glory to the same God, to whom we are indebted for our inferior station in the scale of being.

2. The family in heaven and earth are all governed by the same general laws. There are indeed some laws peculiar to the present state. In a family of children, the younger are under a certain discipline suited to their tender and unexperienced age. So the saints in this world are under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the Father. But the main substance of religion is the same, both in heaven and in earth. The moral kingdom of God is a kingdom which cannot be moved. The laws of it are immutable; and they are all suited to the nature and condition of his subjects, and need no revision or amendment. To love, reverence, worship and serve the Supreme Lord, and to promote the glory of his kingdom, and the hap-

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piness of their fellow subjects, are obligations common to all rational and moral beings in heaven and in earth.

3. As children of the same family, they share in the same pleasures and enjoyments. The glorified spirits are represented as surrounding God's throne, and pouring forth in his presence their songs of adoration and praise—as celebrating his perfections and works, the wonders of his providence toward themselves and other beings, and especially the glories of his grace toward fallen men. The saints below taste a sweetness and delight in the same devout and pious exercises. "It is good to sing praises to the Lord: It is pleasant, and praise is comely." The angels are ministering spirits, sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation. They are highly gratified in beholding the methods, and in serving the designs of divine love toward our guilty race. When the Saviour was born, heaven was moved with joy: There was a multitude of the heavenly host, who came down to earth, and sang, "Glory to God in the highest; on earth peace; good will to men." True Christians here below partake of the same benevolent temper. They rejoice in the good done, and in the opportunities to do good to their fellow mortals. There is joy in heaven, when a sinner repents. There is joy in the church, when religion prevails, and sinners are converted from the error of their ways.

4. As among the members of a family there is usually a general resemblance of features, speech and manners, so the saints above and below have the same general temper; the same distinguishing complexion.

Man, at first, was made little lower than the angels. He bore the same divine image. This was lost by the apostasy. It is in a degree restored by regeneration, which renews the soul after the image of God in righteousness and true holiness. This image will be perfected in heaven, where the children of God shall be made equal to the angels—not, indeed, equal in the

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degree, but equal in the integrity of the moral character.

There are belonging to the Christian temper here, some virtues and graces, for which in heaven there will be no room; such as penitence, selfdenial, temperance, forgiveness, faith and hope. But the main, governing features of the religious temper, are the same in believers here, and in saints and angels above; such as love and gratitude to God, benevolence and goodness to fellow creatures, humility in their views of themselves, and cheerful subjection to the divine will. In heaven charity never fails—God's will is done there—boasting is excluded—all glory is given to God.

5. The saints, in heaven and in earth, have one common interest. In this respect they are like a well regulated family. The glory of God, the advancement of religion, and the promotion of the general happiness of the moral world are the objects on which their hearts are placed. When the Apostle John fell down before the angel who shewed him the things relating to the church of God, the angel said to him, "See thou do it not, for I am thy fellow servant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them who keep the sayings of this book; worship God."

6. The members of a family, however diversified in age, condition, abilities and improvements, agree in this, that they look to, rely upon, and are guided by the same head. It is so in God's great family. Angels and glorified spirits are as much dependent on him, as are the saints below. They have their being in him, and are directed by him. To him they owe, not only their natural existence, but the continuance of their holy and happy state.

7. They are all objects of God's love.

In a virtuous family, there are different measures of virtue in the different members; and the parent, while he loves them all approves some more highly than others. So it is in this large family. There are dif-



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ferent degrees of goodness in the saints here. The best of these fall below the measure of those who are made perfect in heaven. And the highest human saint above must be inferior to the angels, who, having kept their first state, have been in continual progress from their creation. Consequently some of God's family are more excellent and amiable in his sight than others. But yet he loves them all. The smallest measure of grace in the humble believer is pleasing to God; and every work and service which he performs will meet a suitable reward. "Whatsoever good thing any man does, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free." He who only gives a cup of cold water to a needy brother, from love to Christ, shall in no wise lose his reward. The saints are called his treasure—his jewels. He will gather them to himself. None of them will be lost.

8. At the last day, all the saints, these who are now on earth, and those who are in heaven, will meet in God's presence, be openly acknowledged as his children, and admitted to dwell together in his house forever.

Heaven is remote from this earth—remote in its nature, if not in its situation. The saints are here in an evil world—a world of corruption, temptation and sorrow. Into heaven nothing enters which defiles or afflicts. The day is fast approaching, when the saints here, will rise up and ascend on high, to meet and mingle with the saints above; and all will unite together in one great family, never to be dispersed. The Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels. He will come with ten thousands of his saints. The dead in Christ will be raised; they who are alive and remain will be changed; they all will mount up together to meet the Lord, coming with his numerous train, in the air; and thence they will ever be with the Lord.

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We have seen, in what respects the saints in heaven and earth constitute one family.

Let us attend to the reflections which this subject suggests to us.

1. If we estimate the dignity of men from the families with which they are connected, how honorable is the believer? He belongs to the family in heaven. He is a son of the most high God. He is a fellow servant with angels. He has an inheritance with the saints in glory. He has a possession purchased for him, not with corruptible things as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of God's beloved Son. He has a house in reserve for him, which is builded, prepared and furnished, not by human hands, but by a divine power. How should all earthly riches and honors be despised by the Christian, who is born to such noble prospects, and entitled to such glorious possessions? May he not be contented in poverty, and patient in adversity, when he believes, that heavenly riches and everlasting felicities nearly await him, and that his present light afflictions, which are but for a moment, are working for him a far more exceeding, and eternal weight of glory!

2. We see our obligations to mutual condescension, peaceableness and love.

The family in heaven are all of one heart, and one soul. They are united in the worship and service of God, and in the designs of benevolence toward one another. If we profess to belong to that noble family, let us learn to imitate their temper and manners. Let us love one another with a pure heart fervently, and keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. If the church of God on earth is one family, and a part of the great family which is in heaven; if even the angels are willing to be ranked with the saints below, as members of the same household, and employed as fellow servants with them, and even as ministering spirits to them; how unchristian, how unheavenly,

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are pride, contention, disunion and separation among professed believers! How contrary are such tempers to their character as children of that Father, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named! This is a thought which our Apostle often suggests, and which meets us in almost every paragraph of this excellent epistle.

3. If we are God's family, how careful should we be to attend on the orders of his house?

Angels and saints worship God, day and night, in his temple above. It is their joy to come into his presence, bow themselves before him, receive and execute his commands, and celebrate his perfections and works. Let us here imitate their zeal, devotion and piety, that we may be better prepared to join with them hereafter. they who contemptuously forsake the worship, and carelessly neglect the ordinances of God's house, absurdly profess to be the children of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named.

4. Let those who are not of this family be solicitous to obtain a place in it.

Unless you become members of it here on earth, you cannot expect admission into it in heaven. The door of God's house is now open. He sends forth his servants to compel you to come in, that his house may be filled. But know this door will not stand open always. When, by the order of the master of the house, the door shall be shut, you will in vain stand without and knock at the door, saying, "Lord, Lord, open to us;" for he will answer, "I know you not whence you are.

While you live in the indulgence of your sins, you are far from God; you have no portion in the blessings designed for his family. You must be renewed in the spirit of your mind, before you can become fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, and be incorporated with his family in heaven. He

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now invites you to come in, and take a place among his children. Those who come he will graciously receive, and freely love. But if you spurn this kind invitation, and choose still to remain in the society of the ungodly, you will forever be excluded from the fellowship of saints and angels, and finally be turned over into the place prepared, in God's justice, for the punishment of rebellious spirits.

5. Let such as profess to be of God's family, walk as becomes so honorable a relation.

Let them emulate the temper of the blessed above, and aspire to that perfection, which makes them blessed. Let them seek a nearer conformity to, and closer union with the branch of their family, which is already in heaven. And let them daily bow their knees to him, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, "That he would grant them to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith, and that, being rooted and grounded in love, they may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, and may be filled with all the fulness of God."

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# SERMON XX.

## *Christ dwelling in the Saints; and the boundless dimensions of his Love to them.*

EPHESIANS iii. 14—19.

*For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ——— that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, and that ye may be filled with all the fulness of God.*

THE Apostle, now in bonds, for the gospel, was concerned for his new converts in Ephesus, lest, disheartened by the persecutions which had befallen *him*, and which threatened *them*, they should turn away from the faith: He cautions them, that they faint not at his tribulations; and, for their encouragement, he tells them, that he remembered them in his prayers, and bowed his knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ in their behalf. The things which he principally requested for them, are related in the words which have just been read; That they might be strengthened in the inner man—that Christ might dwell in their hearts—that they might be rooted and grounded in love—that they might comprehend the love of

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Christ which passeth knowledge—and that they might be filled with all the fulness of God.

These things will be the subject of our present meditations. And while we contemplate the blessings which Paul sought for the Ephesians, let us seek the same for ourselves.

I. He prays, that "God would grant them, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man."

It was not bodily strength, civil power or worldly distinction, which the Apostle requested for these Christians; it was something far more desirable:—It was the strength, which belongs to the inner man—which comes from God's Spirit—which is granted according to the riches of his glory.

It was the grace of fortitude and patience, that they might persevere in religion, whatever dangers and difficulties should meet them. Thus our Apostle prays for the Colossians, "that they may be strengthened with all might, according to God's glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness."

Christians, weak in themselves, need the power of Christ to rest upon them. In the course of the religious life, they are exposed to dangerous temptations, exercised with great afflictions, and called to difficult services. In such cases they have peculiar need of strength in the inner man.

We are to obtain this strength by "bowing the knee to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." If it comes from his Spirit and from the riches of his glory, we must trust in him and look to him for it. That we may hope and ask with greater confidence, we should contemplate his wisdom, goodness, power and faithfulness, our past experience of his care and love, and especially his wonderful grace displayed in the gospel dispensation.

That we may obtain a supply of strength, we must watch over our hearts, shun known temptations, avoid

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foreseen dangers, and mortify those lusts which war against the soul. And that we may know how to suit our prayers to our wants, we must be conversant with ourselves, and gain an intimate acquaintance with our spiritual state. The better we know ourselves, the better we can judge what to pray for, the more we shall abound in matter of prayer, and the more easily we shall pour out our hearts before God. Our barrenness and deadness in prayer are greatly owing to our ignorance of, and inattention to ourselves.

II. The next thing which Paul requests for the Ephesians is, that "Christ may dwell in their hearts by faith." The same sentiment he expresses in his exhortation to the Colossians. "As ye have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him, built up in him, and established in the faith as ye have been taught."

The phrase of "Christ's being in us," is often used to express our *conformity* to him. He is then in us, when his word takes possession of our hearts and governs our lives; and when, having the same mind as was in him, we walk as he walked.

The phrase of "Christ's *dwelling* in us," imports *constancy* and *perseverance*. They only, in whom his word *abides*, are his real disciples.

As we become united to Christ by faith, so by faith he dwells in our hearts. "The just live by faith." That we may steadily maintain our obedience to his laws and our imitation of his character, we must walk by faith in his grace and power. The Apostle says, "I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life, which I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."—"His word works effectually in them who believe."—"The word preached will not profit unless it be mixed with faith in them who hear it."

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To judge whether we are accepted of God, we must inquire whether Christ dwells in us—whether we are conformed to his character, influenced by his doctrines, and governed by his precepts. The reality of our faith is best proved by our constancy in the love and practice of religion. It is not safe to conclude that we are justified unto life, before we have time to inquire whether Christ thus dwells in our hearts by faith. There is nothing more contrary to the instructions and cautions of the gospel, than strong and bold conclusions in our own favor, before we have the evidence which arises from the efficacy of faith in purifying the heart. It is the *work* of faith, the *labor* of love, the *patience* of hope, and the *fruit* of godly sorrow, which manifest the existence of these graces in the soul.

III. The Apostle prays, that the Ephesian Christians "may be rooted and grounded in love."

By love he doubtless intends love to *Christ*, who is the object mentioned immediately before and after. Love to Christ is one of the great principles of religion. If any man love not our Lord Jesus Christ, he is pronounced accursed. But grace is promised to them, who love him in sincerity.

This love is not merely an emotion of the heart on a view of the great things which Christ has done and suffered: It is a temper in the soul leading us to approve of him, delight in him, and cleave to him in his whole character, as a teacher, ruler and redeemer. It includes a love of his example, doctrines and precepts, as well as gratitude for his mediation, and rejoicing in the hope of his salvation.

True love to Christ is *Supreme*: it surpasses all earthly affections. He has said, "whosoever loveth son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me." The genuine effect of this love is *obedience*. "If ye love me," says our Lord, "keep my commandments." —"Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I have commanded you."



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Where love to Christ reigns, there will be a hatred of sin and watchfulness against it. "They who are Christ's have crucified the flesh." There will be a high admiration of, and ready compliance with the way of salvation through him. The believer "counts all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ, and suffers the loss of all things to win him." There will be a concern to promote his honor and interest in the world. Peter was to testify his love to his Lord by feeding his flock.

Christians are to be "*rooted* and *grounded* in love." True love is rooted in the heart. It is an habitual temper discovering itself in the fruits of holiness. Where this love is rooted, there is an acquaintance with the religion of Christ, a settled belief of its divinity, and a high esteem of its excellence and importance; and this love will be accompanied with a steady resolution to abide in the doctrine of Christ, whatever dangers may attend it. He only who cleaves to the Lord with purpose of heart, can be said to be rooted and grounded in love.

Imagine not, that love to Christ is a mere sensitive affection, like that which we sometimes feel toward natural objects; or that it is a transient emotion excited merely by a view of Christ, as a man suffering unjustly from the hands of cruel enemies; or only a delightful sensation arising from an apprehension of him as one who loves us and is ready to save us. Such feelings are no more than what wicked men may have under certain circumstances. They come far short of that love which the gospel requires. *This* is nothing less than a love of Christ's complete character—a love of his whole gospel—a love of the way in which salvation is offered. It is a holy temper corresponding with the holy nature of its object. It is a spiritual affection toward Christ viewed as a spiritual Saviour. Its fruits are love to good men—imitation of Christ's example—obedience to his commands—attendance on his in-

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stitutions—zeal for his honor—and diligence in his service.

IV. Another petition for these Ephesian converts is "that they may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge."

All that Christ has done and suffered in our cause, is in no degree the effect of our desert, but wholly the fruit of his own pure benevolence. "He *loved* us and gave himself for us."—"Hereby perceive we his *love*, because he laid down his life for our sakes."

This love passes our knowledge; it exceeds our comprehension; but there is a sense in which we may know it, and should endeavor, with all saints, more and more to comprehend it.

1. The love of Christ passeth knowledge.

It passes all *known examples* of love. The prophet, speaking of the love of God manifested in the forgiveness of sinners, says, "His ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts: But as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are his ways higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts."

Great instances of goodness have now and then been known among men. The parent for his children—one friend for another has done and suffered much. The parent who is evil can give good things to his children. For a good man peradventure some would dare to die. This, however, is the highest exertion of human love, that a man lay down his life for his friend. But the love of Christ far exceeds this: He has commended his love toward us, in that, while we were sinners and enemies, he died for us."

This love passes our *comprehension*. We may have a just conception of it; but we cannot comprehend its dimensions: The Apostle speaks of the breadth, and length, and depth, and height of the love of Christ which passeth knowledge."

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It passes knowledge in respect of its *breadth*, or *extent*. It, in some respects, extends to the whole world —to all nations in all ages, from Adam down to the close of the human succession. The benefits which it has procured, are offered to all on the same terms, without any distinction. They are not confined to this or that people, or to this or that period, or to any particular description or character; but are to all, and upon all them who believe, whether Jews or Gentiles, male or female, bond or free, young or old, great sinners or small; and there is no difference.

Yea; this love extends, not only to men, but to angels, who look with pleasure into the wonders of redemption, and learn from the church the manifold wisdom of God. All things, which are in heaven and in earth, are to be gathered together in Christ and to become one family. Hence the angels are represented as joining with the elders in this song of praise to the Lamb. "Thou art worthy—for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood—."

How vast is the breadth of Christ's love! What myriads of the human race, in the long succession from the first to the last generation of mortals, will be made partakers of it? Many indeed will perish, but the nations of them who are saved, will be such multitudes as no man can number. And besides these, there is an innumerable company of angels—ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, who worship the Redeemer and give honor to his name.

The love of Christ passes knowledge, in respect of its *length*. It is an *everlasting* love. Believers are chosen of God in him before all ages, that they might be holy and without blame before him in love. He, from the days of eternity, entered into a covenant of peace with God, in which he engaged to make his soul an offering for sin, and received a promise, that he should see his seed, and the pleasure of the Lord

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should prosper in his hands. This engagement he, in the fulness of time, executed, by assuming our flesh and bearing our sins on the cross. The salvation which his death has purchased for believers is an *everlasting* salvation. As his thoughts of love were from eternity, so the effects of his love will last to eternity.

The *depth* of Christ's love passes knowledge. In his unbounded compassion to our race, he laid aside his divine form—his heavenly glory—made himself of no reputation—took on him the fashion of a man—the form of a servant—and humbled himself to death, even the death of the cross. Can we conceive what he suffered for our sakes, when his soul was filled with sorrow, his frame convulsed with pain, his sweat like drops of blood, his limbs distended on the tree, his hands and feet pierced with nails, and his side with a spear, and his voice raised to heaven in this strong and bitter cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" O the depth of that love which brought the Son of God from heaven to such a depth of humiliation and distress! Again: The *height* of Christ's love passes knowledge. Being exalted to the highest heavens, he employs himself in works of love and grace. He intercedes for them who come to God in his name—he dispenses the heavenly gifts which he has received for men—he watches over his church, and sheds down his gracious influence for her preservation and increase.

His love passes knowledge, as the *benefits* which it has procured exceed all human estimation. The Apostle preached "the *unsearchable* riches of Christ." Who can conceive the value of that pardon, the worth of that salvation, and the glory of that inheritance, which he has purchased for the saints? Being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." This "peace of God passeth all understanding."—"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the hearts of men the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

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2. Though the love of Christ passeth knowledge, yet there is a sense in which it is *known to the saints.*

They have a *thankful* and *admiring* knowledge of that love, which moved so glorious a person to humble himself so low, and to do and suffer so much for creatures so worthless—so guilty. When they consider the heavens, the work of his fingers, the moon and stars which he has ordained, they say with David, "What is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that thou visitest him?"

They have an *experimental* knowledge of his love. They not only view it as a subject of pleasing contemplation, but feel the power of it on their hearts. By the love of Christ they have been made partakers of the renewing influences of the Spirit, wrought to the temper of the gospel, and interested in its blessings. The Apostle says, "We were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another: But after the *kindness* and *love* of God our *Saviour* toward man appeared, not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which he has shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ, that, being justified by his grace, we might be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

Believers have an *influential* knowledge of Christ's love. The Apostle says, "The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they, which live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him that died and rose again."

The saints have an *assimilating* knowledge of their Saviour's love. Though they cannot comprehend the dimensions of his love, yet they are, in a measure, possessed of the same kind of love. They are, as he was, meek,

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gentle, patient and ready to forgive. They have learnt of him, to love their enemies, to pray for those who despitefully use them, to bless them that curse, to bear revilings without returning them, to condescend to men of low estate, to pity the distressed, and do good as there is occasion. This is Christ's command to his disciples, "Love one another, as I have loved you."

The Apostle's prayer for the Ephesians was, that "they might be *strengthened* to comprehend the love of Christ."

This is an inexhaustible subject. The riches of it are unsearchable. We may dwell upon it with fresh entertainment and increasing pleasure while we live: Yea, eternity will not wear out the theme. This is the song of the saints in heaven. "Unto him who *loved* us, and washed us from our sins in his blood, be glory and dominion for ever and ever."

Let us labor for a greater experimental knowledge of his love. If we are in a state of sin, let us seek from him that grace which is necessary to renew us in knowledge after his holy character. If we are in doubt concerning our interest in his love, let us not rest, till he is formed in us. If we find that he dwells in our hearts by faith, let us grow up in all things into him, and aspire to the measure of his divine fulness. This leads us to observe,

V. The Apostle prays, that the Ephesians "might be filled with all the fulness of God." His meaning is, that they might have such a supply of divine influence, as would cause them to abound in knowledge, faith, love, and all virtues and good works. He prays, in like manner, for the Colossians, "that they might be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, and might walk worthy of the Lord to all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, increasing in the knowledge of God—and that their hearts might be comforted, being knit to-

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gether in love, and to all riches of the full assurance of understanding." And for the Philippians, "that God, who had begun a good work in them; would perform it to the day of Christ; and that they might abound more and more in love and in knowledge, being filled with the fruits of righteousness."

From these petitions we see, that, "by the fulness of God," the Apostle intends such a rich supply of the grace of God, that they might be able to persevere in the faith and practice of religion, to increase and abound more and more in the virtues and works of the gospel, and to obtain a more full assurance of their title to heavenly glory.

We learn then that Christians are not to content themselves with their present attainments, but to aspire after greater eminence in their holy character, and nearer approaches to heavenly perfection. In imitation of Paul's example, they must "forget the things which are behind, and reach forward to the things which are before, pressing toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." They must never indulge an imagination, that they have acquired as much holiness, or done as much service as is needful; but, deeply humbled under a sense of their great imperfections and remaining corruptions, the poorness of their services, and their defects in duty, they must daily renew their application to God's mercy for the pardon of their sins, and to his grace for their assistance in the religious life. Their desires must not stop short of that which the Apostle asked for his converts, that they may be strengthened by the spirit in the inner man—may have Christ dwelling in their hearts—may be rooted and grounded in love—may know the love of Christ which passeth knowledge, and may be filled with all the fullness of God.

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# SERMON XXI.

*God able to do for us far more than we ask or think.*

EPHESIANS iii. 20, 21.

*Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Jesus Christ, throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.*

IN the six preceding verses the Apostle informs the Ephesians, what blessings are requested for them. He bowed his knees in prayer unto the Father of Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant them to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man—that Christ might dwell in their hearts by faith—that they might be rooted and grounded in love—that they might be able to comprehend with all saints, the vast dimensions of Christ's love to them—and that they might be filled with all needful supplies of the grace of God. While he meditates on the breadth and length, the depth and height of the love of Christ, and on those full supplies of grace, which flow to saints from the divine fountain, he breaks forth into the devout doxology, which I have now read. In this, he first acknowledges the infinite power of God to do for us far beyond our peti-



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tions or thoughts: And then he prays, that all glory may be given to God in the church through all ages.

I. We will, first, consider the acknowledgement, which the Apostle makes, of God's allsufficiency, "He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think."

God's *ability* intends not merely his *power*, but all those perfections which render him a suitable object of our faith in prayer. It imports an exact knowledge what our wants are, a ready disposition to supply them, wisdom to discern the proper time and manner of granting supplies, as well as power to effect whatever his wisdom sees best to be done.

Divine power or ability is often, in scripture, considered as including wisdom and goodness; for indeed, without these, there could be no such thing as power, properly so called. Moses, in his intercession for Israel, says, "If thou shalt kill all this people, the nations will speak, saying, Because the Lord was not *able* to bring them into the land which he sware to them, therefore hath he slain them in the wilderness. Now I beseech thee, let the *power* of my Lord be great according as thou hast spoken, saying, The Lord is *long suffering* and of great *mercy*. Pardon I beseech thee the iniquity of this people according to the *greatness* of thy *mercy*." The Apostle says to the Corinthians, "God is *able* to make all *grace* abound toward you, that ye always, having all sufficiency in all things, may abound in every good work." He says to the elders of Ephesus, "I commend you to God, and to the word of his *grace*, which is *able* to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them that are sanctified." His great consolation under a sense of weakness was, that the *grace* of Christ was *sufficient* for him, and that the *strength* of Christ was made perfect in human *weakness*. He therefore took pleasure in *infirmities*, that the *power* of Christ might rest upon him.

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In these and other passages, the power or sufficiency of God to supply our wants manifestly includes his abundant goodness and mercy. And it is particularly in reference to the *riches* of his *glory*, and to the *incomprehensible* dimensions of his *love*, that the Apostle says in the text, "He is *able* to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think."

If we consider our own imperfection, and the boundless perfection of the deity, it will appear, that there is no proportion between what we can ask, and what he can do. It is impossible, that creatures of such limited minds as ours, should comprehend all the things which perfect wisdom may devise, unbounded goodness may design, and infinite power may effect. As the nature, perfections and operations of the divine Being are infinitely superior to the powers which we possess, and the works which we can perform, so we must believe, that he is able to do exceedingly better for us, than we request in our prayers, or imagine in our thoughts.

To illustrate this point, it may be observed,

1. God often does for men those *favors*, which they never thought of asking for themselves. He is found of them who sought him not: Before they call, he hears them; he shews them great things, which they knew not of.

Our happiness, in many cases, depends on things which are entirely out of our sight. We know not what is good for a man in this life, all the days of this vain life which he spends as a shadow. But the perfect wisdom of God sees all the connexions and dependencies of things through the boundless extent of the universe, and the endless duration of eternity; the relation of every creature to other beings around him; and the influence that every event will have on his happiness or misery. That Providence, which God exercises in the world, is guided, in every step, by this consummate—this all comprehensive wisdom; and as it is

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particularly employed for the benefit of pious men, to whom all things shall work for good, so undoubtedly there are innumerable cases, in which God orders circumstances and events in their favor, without their request or knowledge. In some instances they are able afterward to discover the happy consequences of events, which, in the time of them, appeared quite indifferent, or perhaps very unfavorable to their interest. And, without question, there are numberless cases, in which their safety is owing to causes, which they never will discover, until the mysterious scenes of Providence shall be opened to their grateful and astonished view in the future world.

2. God answers prayer in *ways* that we think not of. As he requires us to make known to him our requests, so he assures us, that his ears are open to them. He will not always bestow the particular things which we ask, for we often mistake our own interest; but he will grant us things more valuable in themselves, or better adapted to our condition. Or if he gives us the blessings in substance, he will send them in a more suitable time and manner, than we had proposed. Paul's prayer for the removal of an infirmity, which seemed an obstruction to his ministerial success, was answered in a way far better than he asked or imagined. Sufficient grace was afforded him, not only to comfort him under his peculiar trial, but to give him greater success in his ministry, than he could have expected, if the infirmity had been removed.

Pious Jacob doubtless often prayed for the prosperity of his children, especially of Joseph, concerning whom he had conceived peculiar hopes. But the patriarch had no conception of the dignity to which this son would be advanced, nor of the useful sphere in which he would move; much less did he imagine by what mysterious methods God would raise him to such distinguished importance, and make him instrumental of general good to mankind. The course of

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Providence seemed, for a time, to be against him; but eventually it appeared to be designed for his own and the common felicity.

I remember to have heard, on good authority, a remarkable story of an *African*, which will illustrate this thought. The poor negro, in his own country, was led, by contemplation on the works of nature, to conceive that there must be, though invisible to him, a supreme, all powerful, wise, just and good Being, who made and governed the world. Impressed with this sentiment, he used daily to pray to this invisible Being, that he might by some means or other, be brought to a more distinct knowledge of him, and of the service due to him. While he was in this contemplative and devout state of mind, he, with a number of others, was treacherously and perfidiously taken by some of his own countrymen, and soon after was sold for a slave. Now his faith began to waver, "For," thought he with himself, "if there is such a just and good Being, as I have supposed, who governs the world, how is it possible, that fraud and iniquity should be successful against innocence and integrity? Why am I and my fellow prisoners, who have acted with openness and simplicity, made to suffer, while our enemies are permitted to triumph in the success of their deceit and violence?"—The poor fellow after several changes of masters, was finally sold into a pious family in New-england, where he was carefully instructed in the Christian religion, which he embraced with great appearance of sincerity and joy, and obeyed with exemplary diligence and zeal. And in the relation of his story, he often made this pious reflection, that while he was perplexed to see the triumph of fraud over innocence, God was really answering his fervent prayers, and bringing him to the enjoyment of the means of religious knowledge and eternal salvation—that what he had thought was an objection against the justice of

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Providence was really a wonderful and merciful compliance with his daily supplication. To proceed,

3. The mercies which God is pleased to grant us, often produce happy *consequences* far beyond what we *asked* or *thought*.

In our prayers, our thoughts usually stop at the enjoyment of the blessing requested. God's gracious design, in the bestowment of the blessing, reaches forward to a long series of happy events, which stand connected with it. We sometimes ask we know not what; and God, whose wisdom judges right, does exceedingly better for us than we ask—he denies our prayer. If what we have asked be a real favor, it may probably comprise abundantly more than we think. It may be pregnant of consequences, which we cannot foresee, or even imagine. When Saul, the blasphemer and persecutor, was converted to the faith of Christ, he certainly viewed himself as having obtained a high favor—a favor of more value than all the riches and honors of the universe. But this happy convert could have no conception of the interesting consequences of his conversion to the world of mankind, in that and all succeeding generations. At first his thoughts were chiefly employed in his own deliverance from guilt. But afterward, when he became more acquainted with the gracious purposes of God in his conversion, he made this admiring reflection; "I for this cause obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all long suffering for a pattern to them, that should afterward believe in him to life everlasting. To God be honor and glory forever and ever." The Apostle observes, that, in the mysterious workings of Providence, the unbelief of the Jews was the occasion of a more general conversion of the Gentiles; and on the other hand, the faith of the Gentiles, in some future period, will prove the means of reclaiming the unbelieving Jews. He says to the Roman converts, "Ye have obtained mercy through their unbelief, that

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through your mercy they may obtain mercy.—O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! Who hath known the mind of the Lord? Or, Who hath been his counsellor? Of him, and through him, and to him are all things. To him be glory, for ever."

4. The *worth* of the blessings, which we ask and God bestows, infinitely exceeds all our thoughts.

The blessings of the gospel are "unsearchable riches." They are purchased with an infinite price—not with corruptible things, such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ. Blessings purchased at such a price must be of immense value. We can form no perfect estimation of their worth in themselves or of their importance to us.

The sinner, awakened to a sense of his guilt, knows pardon and heaven to be vastly more desirable than all the treasures of the earth. He views them as pearls of great price, to purchase which he would sell all that he has. In comparison with them he counts his worldly wealth as dross; and to win them he would cheerfully suffer the loss of all things. While he meditates on the evil of sin and its dreadful demerit, he feels ardent and increasing desires of God's forgiving and saving mercy. But all his desires—all his thoughts sink far below the worth of the object.

As we have no adequate conception of the purity and dignity of the Supreme Jehovah, so we can have no full apprehension of the exceeding sinfulness and demerit of our numerous offences committed against this glorious Being; and, consequently, but a very imperfect sense of the immensity of that mercy which they receive, whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. When we ask pardon, we ask that which abundantly exceeds all our thoughts.

The happiness of heaven as much surpasses our ideas, as does the demerit of sin. We know it to be

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something great and good. We raise our apprehensions of it by contemplating the sublime descriptions which we find in the sacred pages. We think how desirable it is to dwell in the glorious presence of God —to enjoy his favor continually—to serve him without interruption—to be free from sin, temptation, fear and pain—to mingle with pure and happy spirits in social devotion and reciprocal love—to be released from all our present perplexities and doubts—to be constantly improving in knowledge and virtue—to have our minds more and more enlarged, our holy desires exalted, and all our wants supplied. We aid our conceptions of the heavenly world by attending to the images and metaphors of scripture. We think of thrones, crowns, kingdoms, glories, honors, riches, joys complete, and pleasures everlasting. But after all, "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love him."

The blessings which the gospel offers are *eternal*: And *eternity* is an idea much too big for mortals to receive. We can only view it by parts; and yet parts it hath none. We add years to years, and ages to ages, till imagination is overwhelmed; but after the utmost stretch of thought, the object is still ungrasped. Since boundless duration belongs to the blessings which we ask, we ask more than we can think. When we pray for the pardon of sin—peace with God—sanctifying grace—admission into heaven, we ask things which God can give; but which we cannot comprehend.

Now if God is able to do thus abundantly for us, how confidently may we rely on him in all our straits—how cheerfully may we apply to him in all our wants? Filled with a sense of the divine power and goodness, the prophet says, "Although the figtree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flocks shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall

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be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of my salvation." St. Paul's consolation in all his dangers, and in the view of death was this; "I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded, that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him." This was the ground of that noble fortitude with which the youths in Babylon despised the terrors of the furnace: "The God whom we serve is able to deliver us, and he will deliver us."

If we believe that a Being of perfect wisdom, power and goodness governs the world, we have no occasion for anxiety; we may cast our cares on him. If he is for us, Who can be against us? If he defends us, Who can harm us? If he sustains us, What can depress us? If he disposes our condition, What can happen amiss? Our only concern should be to secure his favor, and stand approved in his sight. Conscious of the integrity of our hearts, we may be joyful in all circumstances, and preserve a serenity of spirit amidst all changes.

When we meet with adversities, let us contemplate the wisdom, power and goodness of that Being, who marvellously turns to good the things which look like evil, and overrules for the benefit of the godly the events which wear the deadliest aspect.

While we view ourselves as in the hands and under the care of such a Being, we may despise the terrors of the world, and rise superior to temptation, adversity and death. "I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved." —"Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for God is with me."— "God is our strength, a very present help in trouble; therefore we will not fear, though the earth be removed out of its place, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea."

With what delightful confidence may we approach to God in prayer? We feel a thousand wants, which



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we are unable to supply. We look around, and soon perceive the vanity of human help. But despairing here, we can with courage go and tell our wants to God, who is able to do more than we ask. We are conscious of great unworthiness; but his grace can abound more than even our sins have abounded. It is impossible we should ask as much as his goodness, wisdom and power can do. How inexcusable are they, who live prayerless in the presence of such a Being?

What glorious hopes may Christians entertain?—— Of the happiness which awaits the godly, the gospel gives us most exalted descriptions. But after the highest conceptions, which, by the help of these descriptions, we form of future happiness, still it is something, which abundantly exceeds all that we think. Let us then be patient in tribulation, joyful in hope, instant in prayer, and zealous of good works; for our labor and patience will not be vain—our prayers and hopes will not be disappointed. Greater and more glorious things await us, than we ever have asked, or now can think.

But, on the other hand, let us remember, that God is able to destroy, as well as to save. And as the happiness which awaits the just, so the misery which threatens the impenitent, will vastly exceed all previous apprehensions.' Sinners will perish with a wonderful destruction—a destruction which they would not believe, though one should declare it to them. They will be punished by that God, whose power is infinite —yea, punished with everlasting destruction from the glory of his power.—And who knows the power of his anger? Who can conceive the severity of that punishment, which anger, armed with omnipotence, will execute on those who have despised the riches of divine grace? If to offend against God's purity and justice is dangerous, How dreadful to offend against his mercy and love? If sin by the commandment becomes exceedingly sinful, How sinful does it become by its op-

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position to the grace of the gospel? They, who treat this with contempt, treasure up unto themselves wrath against the day of wrath. And wrath will come on them to the uttermost. We proceed,

II. To consider the ascription of glory which the Apostle makes to this Allsufficient God. "To him be glory in the church throughout all ages."

As God is in himself a most glorious Being, we are bound to glorify him in our hearts, by just thoughts of him and suitable regards to him—to glorify him in our actions by an imitation of his goodness, and a steady obedience to his commands—to glorify him in our language by speaking of him with reverence, and praising him for his benefits.

But what the Apostle here more especially desires is, that glory may be given to God in the church. God has predestinated us to the adoption of children, that we might be to the praise of the glory of his grace.

1. God is glorified by the *increase* of the church.

As a king is honored in the multitude of his obedient subjects, and in the voluntary emigrations of many people into his dominions; so the glory of God's name is advanced on earth, when to his kingdom are made additions of such as serve him in holiness and righteousness, and walk in his commandments and ordinances blameless. The prophet, speaking of the happy increase of the church, says, "They shall come with acceptance on God's altar, and shall glorify the house of his glory." If, then, we would give glory to God in the church, let us invite and encourage many to come and join themselves to him in a perpetual covenant. This is the Lord's direction to his disciples, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

2. God is glorified in the church, when a *devout regard* is generally paid to the *ordinances* which he has instituted.

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The disciples, who continued with one accord in the temple, are said to have praised God; and they who offer praise glorify his name. As the church is formed for the social worship of God, in prayer, praise and hearing of the word, so the beauty of it much consists in the constant, regular and united attendance of Christians on his appointed worship. They who forsake the assembling of themselves together contradict the principal design for which the church was erected, and cast a manifest reproach on the great head of it. Christians are a peculiar people, a holy priesthood, chosen to shew forth the praises of God; and they have obtained an inheritance in his church, that they should be to the praise of his glory.

3. God is glorified by the observance of *good order* in the church, and by the decent attendance of the members on their respective duties.

This is the instruction given by St. Paul; "Having gifts differing according to the grace bestowed on us, whether prophecy, let it be according to the proportion of faith; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; or he that ruleth, with diligence; he that speaketh, let him speak as the oracles of God; and he that ministereth, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth; that God in all things may be glorified."

Now if we break in on this order; if the teacher neglects the duty of teaching, and entangles himself in in the affairs of this life; or if, forsaking the oracles of God; he teaches the commandments of men, or the imaginations of his own brain; or if the private Christian assumes the teacher, and, vainly puffed up with a carnal mind, intrudes into those things which he has not learned; or if the teacher, quitting his own proper charge, enters into other men's labors, and causes divisions in the churches; then God is dishonored, for

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he is a God of order, not of confusion, in all churches of the saints.

4. That God may be glorified, there must be *peace* and *unity* in the church.

"Where envy and strife are, there is confusion and every evil work."—Whatsoever ye do, "says the Apostle, "do all to the glory of God, giving no offence, neither to Jew, nor Gentile, nor to the church of God."—"be like minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus, that ye may, with one mind and one mouth, glorify God."

If, then, a church becomes a scene of wrathful contentions—if there are in it whisperings, swellings, tumults, mutual censures and reproaches, interruptions of religious communion, divisions, separations, and withdrawings from the stated worship; there is a total perversion of the great design of its institution, and the name of God and his doctrine are profaned.

5. That glory may be given to God in the church, there must be *exemplary holiness* in its members.

Our Lord says, "Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bring forth much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples." The Apostle prays for the Philippians, "that they may be filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God."

We, who, by our profession, belong to the church of God, ought to be exceedingly careful, lest by our unworthy behavior we dishonor God, whom we are under every obligation to glorify. Let it be our prayer, that glory may be given to God in the church; especially in that society, of which we are members. Let us seek its increase by encouraging others to join themselves to it. Let us walk in God's appointed ordinances blameless, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together; but coming together into one place. Let us attend on our respective duties, and do good according to the ability which God has given us.

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Let us study the things which make for peace, and by which we may edify one another. Let us walk worthy of him, who has called us to his kingdom and glory, being fruitful in every good work, increasing in the knowledge of God, established in the faith, and abounding therein with thanksgiving.

Now unto God be glory in the church by Jesus Christ, throughout all ages. Amen.

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# SERMON XXII.

## *Christian Unity.*

EPHESIANS iv. 1—7.

*I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you, that ye walk worthy of the vocation, wherewith ye are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with long suffering, forbearing one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.*

WE see, without surprise, that men differ in sentiment about matters of a secular and civil nature; nor are we to expect a perfect uniformity in the things of religion. Its great doctrines and duties are indeed so plainly revealed, and so clearly expressed in the gospel, that there has seldom been much controversy about them among sober Christians; but in its speculative and ceremonial parts a diversity of opinion often takes place among those, whom candor will esteem to be good and upright souls.

This being the case, what is that temper and behavior which we owe to one another? Shall we censure and condemn our brethren, withdraw from their communion, and exclude them from ours, for every sup-

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posed mistake?—No: Our Apostle inculcates another spirit, and draws a different line of conduct.

In general, we are to treat one another as becomes our Christian character. Mutual love is the great distinctive badge of Christ's disciples. To walk worthy of our vocation, is to walk in love. Some of the more important exercises of brotherly love the Apostle particularly enumerates in our text.

1. Walk *in all lowliness*, or humility.

Similar instructions often occur in the writings of the Apostles. "Let no man think of himself above that which he ought to think, but think *soberly*, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory, but in *lowliness* of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Put on *humbleness* of mind. Be subject one to another, and be clothed with *humility*.

Humble thoughts of ourselves, of our own knowledge, goodness and importance, are necessary to Christian peace and union. "Only from pride cometh contention." They only who think themselves holier than their brethren, and holier than they really are, will say to them, "Stand by yourselves, come not near to us."

Walking in all lowliness, we shall not despise our brethren for their want of the internal gifts, or external advantages, which we enjoy; but remembering, who hath made us to differ from others, we shall charitably employ our superior advantages for their edification and comfort.

We shall not lean to our own understanding; but, conscious of our liableness to err, we shall be attentive to instruction and reproof, open to conviction, and ready to retract our errors, and confess our faults. We shall judge ourselves with severity, and our brethren with candor, and be disposed to think them better than ourselves. We shall rejoice in their prosperity, as well as be thankful for our own, and be ready to acknowledge their virtues, and to condemn our own transgres-

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sions. We shall not affect to be called masters; but remember, that one is our master—even Christ, and that we are all brethren.

2. Walk in—*meekness.* This is a virtue nearly connected with humility. It principally consists in a prudent restraint and government of the passions. While we walk in the spirit of the gospel, we shall not be easily provoked; our resentments will not be sudden, without cause, or beyond bounds. We shall be disposed to interpret in a favorable sense the doubtful words and actions of our brethren, and when we see them surprised, or drawn into a fault, we shall admit in their case all reasonable excuses and extenuations.

If a variance happens, we shall stand ready to be reconciled. We shall on easy terms forgive the offence, considering that our own selfish feelings may probably have overrated it. We shall not suffer anger to rest in our bosoms, nor see the sun to go down on our wrath.

We shall be cautious not to give, as well as slow to take offence. We shall be no brawlers, shall speak evil of no man, but be gentle, shewing all meekness to all men. We shall not behave ourselves unseemly, but courteously adapt our language and manners to the tempers of those with whom we converse, having our speech always with grace, seasoned with salt, that we may know how we ought to answer every man.

In matters of religion our zeal will be tempered with charity. Though we shall be zealous of good works, and shall contend earnestly for the faith delivered to the saints, yet we shall be gentle and condescending in those things, which are only circumstantial, and which enter not into the essence of religion. We shall be candid and moderate in our treatment of different sects, not condemning them in the gross, nor imputing to them errors, which they disavow; but hoping, that there may be integrity of heart, even where we see a misguided judgment. We shall be ready, with meekness and fear,



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to give an answer to every man, who asks us a reason of the hope that is in us; and with the same Spirit shall we receive their answer, when they give us a reason of the hope that is in them.

Such as offend, we shall restore in the Spirit of meekness, considering ourselves, lest we also be tempted. Such as oppose themselves we shall in meekness instruct, praying that God would give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and we shall recommend religion to all men by shewing out of a good conversation our works with meekness of wisdom.

3. To our meekness we must add *longsuffering* and *forbearance*.

These terms express the patient and exalted exercises of meekness, rather than virtues really distinct from it. We are not only to be meek, but longsuffering in our meekness—not only to restrain anger under ordinary offences; but to repress malice and forbear revenge under the highest and most provoking injuries. Charity suffers long, thinks no evil, endures all things, and covers the multitude of sins. It recompenses to no man evil for evil, but overcomes evil with good. In the exercise of this forbearance and longsuffering, we shall highly approve and readily obey these precepts of our divine Lord. "If thy brother trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn to thee, saying, I repent, forgive him. And forgive, not only until seven times, but until seventy times seven. "Resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if any man sue thee at the law and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. And whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain." But does our Saviour require us to be unfeeling under injuries, and tamely submissive to every insolent brute? By no means. There are cases in which we ought to seek redress of of wrongs, and bring offenders to punishment. But smaller injuries in our reputation, property or liberty,

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had better pass unnoticed, than be deeply laid to heart—had better be made the subject of private expostulation, than of public animadversion—had better be borne for the sake of peace, than prosecuted at its expense. And however great the injuries may seem, redress must be sought with the spirit of meekness and love; not with the temper of malice and revenge. Thus our Lord subjoins, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them who despitefully use and persecute you—be ye perfect, as your Father who is in heaven, is perfect."

4. We must *endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

It is not unity of *opinion* which the Apostle recommends; this is not possible to be obtained, nor reasonable to be expected in the present state of mankind. But it is unity of *Spirit*, of heart, and affection, disposing us to preserve the bond of peace, and to maintain all the duties of Christian fellowship, whatever differences of sentiment may take place. To the same purpose are his exhortations to all the churches; and especially to those, in which a diversity of opinion concerning ceremonial usages threatened their internal peace. "Bear the infirmities of the weak. Let every one please his neighbor for his good to edification.—Be ye like minded one toward another, that ye may with one mind and one mouth, glorify God. Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be of one accord, of one mind—let there be no divisions among you, but live in peace." He teaches us to regard all as our fellow Christians, who call on the name of Jesus our Lord, both theirs and ours, who appear to be members of Christ's body, partakers of his Spirit, and subject to his government; and he cautions us, that we reject not those, whom God has received. To justify ourselves in excluding Christian professors from our communion, we must have evidence, that God has not received them.

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There is nothing which the Apostle more earnestly inculcates on the churches, than unity and peace—nothing against which he more solemnly warns them, than divisions and contentions—and of no sort of sinners does he speak with greater severity, and in terms of higher indignation, than of those, who, under pretence of promoting religion, make separations and schisms among Christians. He says, "They serve not the Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and with good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple." He calls them "false apostles, evil and deceitful workers, liers in wait, dogs, grievous wolves, and ministers of Satan." On no subject does his zeal so kindle, as when he is warning the churches against these insidious disturbers of their peace, because no men were pursuing a line of conduct so opposite to the design of the gospel.

Let us particularly attend to the several arguments by which the Apostle urges us to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

1. *There is one body.* The church is a *body*, of which Christ is the *head*, and believers are the *members*. And this body is *one*. "We are all baptized into one body." Though for the convenience of worship, Christians are formed into distinct societies, yet they constitute but one body. They are all subject to one head—animated by one Spirit, and nourished by the same spiritual bread. They are united to their head by faith, and to their fellow members by love. "God hath tempered the parts of the body together, that there should be no schism in it, but that the members should have the same care one of another; that whether one member suffer, all should suffer with it, or one be honored, all should rejoice with it. Now we are the body of Christ, and members in particular. And from Christ the whole body fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, maketh increase to the edifying of itself in love." If we profess to be

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Christians, we call ourselves members of Christ, and fellow-members with each other. Shall we then disturb the unity of the Spirit, and break the bond of peace? Shall the members of the same body separate from each other? Shall they rise against their common head? In the natural body this would be monstrous. In the spiritual body it is impious. When we thus sin against the brethren, we sin against Christ.

2. *There is one Spirit.*

As all the members of the natural body are animated by one soul, so all the members of Christ's body are sanctified, strengthened and led by the same Spirit. The body is one, for by one Spirit we are all baptized into one body. And we all have access through Christ by one Spirit unto the Father. Now if by the Spirit of Christ we become members of his body, then no error in judgment, or mistake in practice, which is not inconsistent with one's having the Spirit, can prove that he is not a real member of Christ, and justify us in excluding him from our fellowship. Since there is one Spirit, which dwells in all good Christians, all contention, bitterness and envy—all animosity, division and separation in the church, are offences against the Holy Spirit. "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God," says the Apostle, "whereby ye are sealed to the day of redemption; and let all bitterness, wrath, clamor and evil speaking, be put away from you." The consideration that the Spirit of God dwells in our brethren, as well as in us, should make us careful to maintain the bond of peace. When we contend with them, we fight against the Spirit of peace. "If there be any fellowship of the Spirit—be ye like minded, having the same love, and let nothing be done through strife or vain glory."

3. *Ye are called in one hope of your calling.*

We are called to obtain the same glorious salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. We are all called by

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the same word; our hope is grounded on the same promises; and the object of our hope is the same immortal life. Hope may be more or less strong and influencing in different Christians, according to their different measures of knowledge and grace; but in its object and foundation, in its nature and tendency, it is the same. This consideration should mightily strengthen the bond of peace. Are we pursuing the same grand design, and walking in the same high road to glory? Let us not fall out by the way; let us go hand in hand, and be fellow workers to the kingdom of God. Do we expect to dwell together in heaven? Let there be no variance among us while we are here. In heaven charity never fails: Let us then, above all things, have fervent charity among ourselves; and purify our souls, by obeying the truth through the Spirit, unto unfeigned love of the brethren.

4. *There is one Lord*, whom we all profess to serve. Jesus Christ is Lord of all by the same right. He has bought us with a high price—redeemed us by his own blood. We all stand on the same footing, and must build our hopes on the same foundation. We have no pretence to glory over one another. Remembering, that we were all under the same guilt and condemnation, and have been redeemed by the same Saviour, we should walk together in all humility, meekness, and love.

There is no respect of persons with Christ, for he is the same Lord over all; and has paid for others the same price as for us. Shall we then dare to smite our fellow servants? Will our common Lord look on with indifference, while we disturb the peace and order of his household? "He who doth wrong, shall receive for the wrong he hath done."

We are called to the same service, are under the same laws, and must appear at the same judgment. "Why then dost thou judge thy brother? Or why

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dost thou set at nought thy brother? For we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. Every one of us must give an account of himself to God. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth. Let us not judge one another any more; but judge this rather, that no man put a stumbling block, or occasion to fall in his brother's way."

5. *There is one faith.* The same gospel is given us for the rule of our faith, and this gospel all Christians profess to receive. Hence the Apostles speak of one common faith—like precious faith, and the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God.

The faith of all true Christians is essentially the same. The object of it is the word of God—the nature of it is receiving the love of the truth—the effect of it is to purify the heart. However they may differ in some matters of speculation, they agree in the great doctrines which are essential to godliness. If we would make allowance for men's misapprehensions of each other's sentiments, for their different phrases and modes of diction, for differences, which proceed from the heat of controversy, and would also throw aside such errors as are merely speculative, the faith of Christians would appear to be more nearly the same, than is generally imagined. St. James says, "I will shew you my faith by my works." If your brethren question the soundness of your faith, go, shew it in this orthodox and apostolic manner. If they give you the same proof of their faith, however weak you may think them in some things, receive them, but not to doubtful disputation. If your faith and theirs, is thus far one; with respect to other things, forbear one another in love.

6. *There is one baptism*, which is the badge of our relation to Jesus Christ. We are all baptized in the name of Christ; and he is not divided. Christians

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may differ in their opinions concerning the age at which persons become the subjects of baptism, and the manner in which they ought to receive it; but still, in regard of the great design of it, which is the answer of a good conscience toward God, and in regard of the obligations implied in it, which are to put off the works of the flesh, and to put on the Lord Jesus Christ, it is one and the same. We all consider it as an institution of Christ, a badge of our relation to him, a token of our obligation to depart from iniquity, and a seal of the righteousness of faith; and though we may differ in some of the smaller circumstances of it, why may we not view it as substantially the same? Why may we not walk together as brethren, and keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace? Baptism was not intended to break Christians into various sects, as if some were baptized in the name of Paul—some in the name of Apollos—and some in the name of Cephas; but to unite the whole Christian world; for all are baptized in the name of Christ, and into one body.

7. *There is one God and Father of all, who is above all, through all, and in us all.*

There is one God who is the Father of the whole creation; but in a more eminent sense the Father of Christians. He has not only created them by his power, and supported them by his Providence, but he has also by his Spirit begotten them to newness of life, and by his grace adopted them to a heavenly inheritance. We have all one Father, one God has created us, one Spirit has sanctified us, one inheritance is reserved for us—All we are brethren—Let us love one another with a pure heart fervently. How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity?

Our God and Father is *above all.* He reigns supreme. The great and leading precept which he has given his children is, that they love one another. This

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is the royal law—it is the end of the commandment. We are above all things to put on charity. Every opposition to this law is rebellion against the highest authority.

God is *through all.* His essence pervades our frame, his eyes search and try our souls, his influence preserves our spirits. To him is known every malevolent, unsocial and contentious passion that moves within us. Our uncharitable affections to one another are ingratitude and impiety to him, in whom we live, and move, and have our being. "God is love; if we dwell in love, we dwell in God, and he in us. If we say we love God, and still hate our brother, we deceive ourselves; for he who loveth not his brother, whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen?"

God is *in all,* i. e. in all true Christians by his Spirit. They are the temple of God, and his Spirit dwelleth in them. Every malicious, envious, revengeful passion which the Christian indulges, is an opposition to the Spirit of God, whose fruits are love, peace, longsuffering, gentleness and meekness; and every injury which he commits against his fellow Christians, is an insult upon that Spirit which dwells in them; for they are the temple of God, and if any man profane this temple, him will God destroy. Christians are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit; all divisions and separations among the members of the church of God are inconsistent with their enjoying the Spirit. He dwells with those who are meek and humble, and tremble at the word—not with the proud, selfconfident and vain.

They who cause divisions in churches in order to form new sects, usually make high pretensions to the influence of the Spirit. But whatever they may pretend, their conduct demonstrates, that they have not the Spirit of God; for he is not a Spirit of contention, but



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of peace; and his work is not division and separation among Christians, but unity and love. See then that you walk worthy of your vocation, in all humility, meekness, forbearance and love, keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; for there is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, through all, and in us all.

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# SERMON XXIII.

## The Gracious Gifts of Christ's Ascension.

EPHESIANS iv. 8—13.

*Wherefore he saith, when he ascended on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it, but that he descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same that also ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.) And he gave some apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.*

THE Apostle, having mentioned, in the 7th verse, the grace bestowed on believers "according to the measure of the *gift* of Christ," immediately proceeds, in the words now read, to explain what the *gifts* are which Christ has bestowed; and to shew, that they were dispensed at his ascension, according to the divine purpose, for the general edification of the church.

To prove that the ascension of Christ was to be followed with the bestowment of spiritual gifts, he quotes a passage from the 68th Psalm. "Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive; thou

hast received gifts for men." That this was spoken, not of the divine nature, but of Christ, as God manifest in the flesh, he concludes from the expression, "Thou hast ascended on high." For his *ascension* presupposes a *descent* into the lower parts of the earth. And he who thus descended is the same that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things. These terms cannot properly be applied to God, who is a universal Spirit; nor yet can they, in their full sense, belong to David, or any mere man; and therefore must be understood of Jesus Christ.

Our Lord's "descent into the lower parts of the earth," may signify his *incarnation*; according to these words of David, "My substance was not hid from thee, when I was curiously wrought *in the lower parts of the earth*." Or it may refer to his *death* and *burial*, in which sense the phrase is also used. "They that seek to destroy me shall go down into *the lower parts* of the earth;" or into the grave.

Christ's exaltation is expressed by his "ascending up *far above all heavens*"—above these visible starry heavens—into the glorious presence of God, who has set his glory above the heavens.

Elsewhere he is said to be "made higher than the heavens;" and to be "raised to heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion."

Christ has thus ascended, "that he might fill all things;" i. e. might, according to his promise, fill his apostles and other disciples with heavenly gifts and graces, and thus furnish them to every work which they should be called.

"He led captivity captive."—This phrase is used, in the Old Testament, to signify a complete conquest over enemies, especially over such as had formerly been victorious. This is the meaning of it in the song of Deborah. In our text it refers to Christ's triumph over *Satan* and *Death*. "He, by his death, delivered

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those, who through fear of death were subject to bondage."—"He spoiled principalities and powers, triumphing over them on the cross." But he triumphed more gloriously, when, after his ascension, he poured down his Holy Spirit on his apostles and disciples, and thus enabled them to cast out devils, and to turn sinners from the power of Satan unto God. He also triumphed over death in a most conspicuous manner, when, rising from the grave, ascending into heaven, and shedding forth miraculous gifts, he demonstrated his power to quicken whom he would, to call forth the dead from their graves, and to exalt believers to an eternal state of glory with himself.

"He gave gifts to men." The expression in the 68th Psalm is, "He *received gifts for* men." He received gifts from the Father to bestow them on men. "It hath pleased the Father, that in him all fulness should dwell; and that of his fulness we all should receive grace for grace." All power in heaven and earth, is committed to him. Hence, when he commanded his apostles to go forth and preach the gospel, he promised to endue them with power from on high, by which they should cast out devils, speak with new tongues, recover the sick and defeat all the power of the enemy, and thus demonstrate their divine commission.

Besides these extraordinary gifts vouchsafed for the confirmation of the gospel, he promised and bestowed such an internal influence of the Spirit, to accompany the preaching of the gospel, as should open men's hearts to attend to it and believe it. Accordingly, wherever the apostles went preaching the word, multitudes were turned from darkness to light, from the power of Satan to God, and from the works of the flesh to works meet for repentance.

The extraordinary gifts continued only for a season, until the gospel was established. The ordinary influence of the Spirit is alike necessary in all ages, and

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with, in a greater or less degree, attended the gospel to the end of the world.

Among the gifts bestowed on the church, St. Paul particularly mentions the *officers* appointed for its edification. "Christ gave some apostles; some prophets; some evangelists; some pastors and teachers."

By apostles, prophets and evangelists are intended those extraordinary ministers, who were employed to propagate the gospel in the world; and who, for that purpose, were endowed with miraculous powers. By pastors and teachers are generally understood those ordinary ministers, who had the care of particular churches, and who were to be continued in succession to the end of the world. A similar distinction is made in the 12th chapter of the First Epistle to the Corinthians. "God hath set some in the church; first apostles; secondarily prophets; thirdly teachers; after that miracles, &c."

The name of *apostle* is especially applied to those who were immediately commissioned by Jesus Christ, to be witnesses of his doctrines and works, his death and resurrection, and to go forth and publish his gospel among the nations of the earth. To these, as occasion required, the Spirit revealed the mysteries of the divine will, that they might communicate them to the world.

*Prophets* were also endowed with supernatural knowledge in divine things; the knowledge of the ancient scriptures—of the doctrines and mysteries of the gospel—and, in some cases, of future events. These were chiefly employed in opening and explaining to believers the great truths of religion.

*Evangelists* are generally supposed to have been men employed in propagating the gospel among the Heathen, in founding churches where Christ had not been named, and in confirming the churches which were already founded. They are distinguished from

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the apostles only as their gifts and employments were more limited and confined.

*Pastors* and *teachers* were those who labored in word and doctrine, especially in particular churches, of which they had the immediate charge. As the apostles received the word more immediately from Christ, either by his personal instruction, or spiritual inspiration, so they from time to time communicated it to the pastors and teachers, who, receiving it from them, preached it to others, for their conversion to, and edification in the faith of the gospel. This appears from Paul's charge to the elders of Ephesus, from his instructions to Timothy and Titus, and from John's letters to the angels of the churches in Asia.

Christ gave these various officers "for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ." Or, as the words, more agreeably to the original, may be rendered, He gave pastors and teachers, *in order to the preparing of holy men for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.** The officers whom Christ gave, were to instruct and furnish others for the ministry; and thus a succession of ministers was to be continued in the church, for her edification in knowledge, faith and holiness.

In the passage now explained several things are suggested which deserve our particular attention.

I. It is evident, that public teachers in the church are to be a distinct order of men.

Christ has given *some* pastors and teachers. He has set *some* in the church; first apostles, next prophets, then teachers. Are *all* apostles? Or *all* prophets? Or *all* teachers?——By no means.——If all the body were one member, Where were the body? If all the

* Πρὸς τὸν καταρτισμὸν τῶν ἁγίων εἰς ἔργον διακονίας εἰς οἰκοδομὴν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ χριστοῦ.

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members of the church were to assume one office. Where were the church?

None have a right publicly to teach in the church, but those who are *called—sent*—authorized to the work in the gospel way. "How shall they preach, except they be sent?"—"No man taketh this honor to himself but he that is called of God, as was Aaron;" and as were his sons. They were consecrated by Moses, God's minister, according to his appointment, that they might minister to him in the priest's office. Korah and his companions fell under an awful condemnation, because they presumed to offer incense with unhallowed hands, pretending that all the congregation were holy, and that one had as good a right as another, and *they* as good a right as the sons of Aaron, to perform the solemn functions of the priesthood. To these impious usurpers Jude compares those who had crept into the church unawares, turning the grace of God into wantonness. He says, "They have gone in the way of Cain, run greedily after the error of Balaam, and perished in the gainsaying of Korah." All Christians are to exhort, reprove and comfort one another, as there is occasion; but public teaching in the church belongs peculiarly to some—to those who are given to be pastors and teachers.

II. Public teachers are here called Christ's gifts. "He *gave* some pastors and teachers." And they are to be received by the church in the way, in which he sends them.

There is a particular order, which Christ has instituted, for the introduction of public teachers. The first apostles were commissioned immediately by him. In the time of his ministry on earth, he ordained twelve to preach the kingdom of God among the Jews. After his resurrection, he enlarged their commission, saying, "Go, preach the gospel to all nations." But for this work they must understand the languages of all nations; therefore he says, "Tarry ye at Jerusalem,"

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confine your ministry there, "until ye be endued with power from on high." On the day of Pentecost, which was about ten days after Christ's ascension, when the twelve apostles, and those who had companied with them, while Christ went in and out among them, making in all about an hundred and twenty, were all gathered together in one place, the Holy Ghost was shed on them in miraculous gifts, and there appeared, on each of them, cloven tongues, like as of fire, and they began to speak with other tongues. And all the people, who were assembled from different countries to attend the festival, heard them speak, in their own various languages, the wonderful works of God. To this remarkable event the apostle refers, when he says in the text, "Christ ascended on high, and gave gifts to men, and he gave some apostles, some prophets, &c.

They who were thus commissioned of heaven to preach the gospel, were authorised to ordain *others*. Paul, after his conversion, presumed not to preach, until Ananias, by immediate direction from Christ, had informed him, that he was chosen to this work, and had confirmed the information by a miracle. Afterward Paul came to Jerusalem, and was there received by the apostles. And when he was about to go, in company with Barnabas, on a mission to the Heathens, they were both separated to this mission, by the prophets and elders of the church, who fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, and sent them away.

Timothy was ordained a bishop or elder by the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. And the things which he had received, the same he was to commit to faithful men, who should be able to teach others also.

When Paul and Barnabas went forth preaching the gospel and planting churches among the Gentiles, *they* ordained elders in every church.

Titus, who was a minister in the Isle of Crete, was left there by Paul, for this, among other purposes,



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"that he might ordain elders in every city." If the eldership might be assumed at pleasure, or conferred by private hands, why should Titus be left in Crete to ordain elders?

Christ gave pastors and teachers, not only to preach his gospel, but to train up and prepare holy men for the same work. They who undertake this sacred work should be *saints*; but it is not *every* saint who is qualified for it. There must be a previous education. They who desire the ministerial office should be fitted for it under the instructions, and sent forth under the recommendations of teachers already in office. This our apostle plainly signifies, when he says, Christ gave apostles, prophets and teachers, at his ascension, "in order to the perfecting of saints for the work of the ministry."

We find, in scripture, no instance of ordination to the ministerial office, by any other than elders of churches. Every church has a right to *choose* her own minister; but his induction into office must be by the hands of the presbytery. When some were to be appointed to preside over the church stock, and the daily ministrations to the poor, the apostles referred the *choice* of the persons to the multitude of the disciples; but the *ordination* they reserved to themselves. They said, "Look ye out seven men of honest report—whom *we* may appoint over this business."

As the approbation of elders was necessary to authorise men to preach the gospel, so we find, that the apostles, for the prevention of fraud and imposition, sent forth their preachers with written testimonials. This appears from the history of the Acts and from Paul's epistles, to have been an uniform practice. And the churches were never to receive a stranger, in the capacity of a minister, unless he could exhibit some evidence, that he was not only a Christian, but a minister, approved of his brethren. It was a sign of great degeneracy in the church of Thyatira, that she suffer-

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ed those to teach who said they were prophets, but brought no credentials of their prophetic character. The church of Ephesus, on the contrary, was commended, because she could not bear them who were evil; but tried them, who said they were apostles, and were not, and found them liars.

III. Ministers are to be men endued with gifts suitable to the work to which they are called.

As in the early days of the gospel, public teachers were called to extraordinary services, so they were endued with extraordinary gifts. But these gifts were only for a season. The Apostle says, "Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge," immediately inspired knowledge, "it shall vanish away."

Since the gospel is fully established, the miracles which attended its first publication are no longer of use; and since it communicates to us all things, which pertain to life and godliness, there is no farther need of inspiration. The Apostle tells Timothy, that the scriptures are able to make the man of God perfect, wise to salvation, and furnished unto every good work.

But as the business of a minister is to teach men the things which Christ has commanded in the holy scriptures, so it is necessary that he himself should be fully instructed in them. One who undertakes to teach others, should well understand, firmly believe, ardently love, and practically exemplify the religion which he teaches. He should not be a novice; but one who holds fast the faithful word, as he has been taught; and one who by sound doctrine is able to exhort and to convince gainsayers. He should be apt to teach, having not only a good knowledge, but an easy faculty of communicating to others the knowledge which he has in the doctrines and duties of the gospel. That he may be able rightly to divide the word of truth, he

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must apply himself to study, and give attendance to reading.

In the early days of the gospel, as there were evangelists, who went forth to preach the gospel, where Christ had not been named; so there were pastors and teachers, who had the immediate care of churches already established. These the apostle charges to take heed to the flocks, over which they were made overseers. Ministers are not to enter into each other's labors, but to move within their respective measures and lines.

IV. The great object of the gospel ministry is the building up of the church of Christ. When he ascended, he gave pastors and teachers—"for the edifying of his body."

The church is edified, when she increases by the addition of new members; and when she becomes more holy by the religious improvements of her present members. In both these ways, the ministry is intended for the edification of the church.

Ministers should so speak the word, as to convince gainsayers, awaken the careless, reclaim the erroneous, instruct the ignorant, and turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. "The servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle, apt to teach, patient, in meekness instructing them who oppose themselves; if peradventure God will give them repentance, to the acknowledging of the truth, that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil."

You will observe; the apostle expresses the success of the gospel by the phrase of *edifying Christ's body*, because wherever his religion prevails in men's hearts, there will be a disposition to come within his church and attend on his ordinances. Real converts will not be indifferent to the edification of Christ's house; much less will they feel a desire to pull it down. They will not rend and divide Christ's body; but seek to preserve its soundness and promote its growth. They

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who, in the Apostle's days were converted to the faith of the gospel, immediately joined themselves to the Lord. The increase and union of the church are the immediate effects of a real revival of religion.

The ministry is designed for the improvement of saints, as well as for the conversion of sinners. They who view themselves as regenerate, are not to suppose, they have already attained, but they are to go on to perfection. For this end they are to attend on the appointed ministration of the word; and to this end the ministration of it should be adapted. The apostles warned every man, and taught every man in all wisdom, that they might present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

Pastors and teachers are given for the edifying of Christ's body, "till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

"There is one faith;" and we should all come to such a good understanding in the doctrines of Christ, as to have this *one*—this *like precious* faith; or, if we differ in sentiment, still to maintain that unity of affection which is the fruit of faith. We should all mind one and the same grand object, the common salvation.

Christians may have various opinions about the less important doctrines of religion; but true faith has the same influence in all. It works by love, and purifies the heart. So far, therefore, as we walk together in mutual peace and love, and in obedience to our common Lord, we may be said to have come to the unity of the faith.

The apostle mentions also the unity of the *knowledge* of Christ. All Christians profess to believe in him as their teacher and Saviour. But unless this profession is accompanied with a love of his precepts and a conformity to his example, it avails us nothing.—

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"Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" To come to the knowledge of Christ, is to have the same mind as was in him, and to walk as he walked. So far as we agree in that holy temper and life, which his example exhibits, and his gospel requires, we come to the unity of the knowledge of him.

As our conformity to Christ will not be perfect in this world, we never must rest in attainments already made, but continually aspire to the character of a perfect man—to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. We must labor to become Christians of full maturity and ripeness in all those heavenly graces which are derived from him. The apostle says of himself, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." He adds, "Let us, as many as are perfect, be thus minded."

## REFLECTIONS.

1. Our subject should lead us to adore the wisdom of God in the provision made for our edification in knowledge and holiness.

He has given apostles and prophets, pastors and teachers, for the edifying of the body of Christ. He has adapted his gifts to different conditions of the church. In its first ages there were apostles; in its ordinary state there are pastors. Since the public ministration of the word is an institution of Christ, designed for the happiness of fallen men, How inexcusable are they who despise it? If this is a mean of converting sinners; they who are conscious of their impenitent and guilty state, should seek the grace and mercy of God for their renovation and forgiveness, by a faithful attendance on this institution. If they put the word of God from them, they judge themselves unworthy of eternal life. If the ministry is designed for the improvement of saints in knowledge and faith, let

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none, in the pride of their own sufficiency, turn away from it. Are you already perfect?——If not, then you need the means of edification; use them with diligence while you are in this world: In the future you will not need them; there you will come to perfect men.

2. If Christ has given pastors and teachers for our edification, till we come in the unity of faith and knowledge to more perfect men, then such a conduct in ministers, or in private Christians, as tends to disunite the body of Christ, must be highly offensive to him. Ministers should remember, that they are ordained to bring men to a unity in the faith and knowledge of Christ, and in love and affection to one another. They should unite their influence to accomplish this end. If they cause divisions and offences, they walk contrary to the doctrine which they have received. They serve not the Lord Jesus. Christians should walk together in love, and study the things which make for peace, both in the church of which they are members, and among other churches of our common Lord.

3. What cause have we to be humble, that, under our means of growth, we fall so much below the stature of perfect men! Let us compare ourselves with the precepts and pattern of Jesus Christ. How much we come short of that purity which his gospel requires, and which his life in the flesh exemplified! It would be useful, that we should take a frequent review of our lives—that we should daily examine the temper of our hearts. Thus we may learn what manner of spirit we are of—what progress we make, or whether any at all—in what respects our tempers need correction, and our lives amendment—and thus we shall be excited to come to the throne of grace, that we may obtain grace to help in the time of need.

4. Let us make continual improvement in religion. This is the best evidence of our sincerity. Christ,

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who has given pastors and teachers for the ministry, has a fulness of the Spirit at his disposal. Of his fulness we may receive grace suited to our cases, and equal to our wants. While we attend on his institutions, let us implore his blessing to accompany them; and thus endeavor to rise above the world, to purge away our remaining corruptions, to strengthen every holy principle, and to abound more and more in every grace and good work, till we come, in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

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# SERMON XXIV.

## *Christian Stability and Maturity.*

EPHESIANS iv. 14, 15, 16.

*That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; but speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ; from whom the whole body, fitly joined together, and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase to the edifying of itself in love.*

IN the preceding verses, the Apostle observes, that Christ instituted the gospel ministry for the edification of his body, the church, until we all come, in the unity of the faith and knowledge of Christ, unto a perfect man. Wherein this complete manhood consists, and by what means we must endeavor to attain it, he instructs us in the words which have been read.

Christian maturity is a steady belief of, and obedience to the gospel, in opposition to fickleness and inconstancy. The way in which we are to obtain and preserve this maturity is union with Jesus Christ, from whom the whole body of believers, compacted and cemented together by every joint of supply, according to its power in the proportion of every part, maketh increase of the body to the edifying of itself in love.



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The Apostle here describes the perfect man, or mature Christian, both negatively and positively. He is not a child tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine: But he is one, who, having embraced and professed the truth with a real love of it, grows up into Christ in all things.

We will, first, consider the negative part of this description.

Christ instituted the gospel ministry, that believers, arriving to maturity in faith and knowledge, should no more be children, tossed to and fro, and driven about with every wind, by the sleight of men, and the cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive.

Several metaphors are here used to express that weakness and versatility, which some discover, and which honest Christians, under the ministry of the word, will endeavor to outgrow.

1. Christians must not remain *children*.

In humility, meekness and teachableness let them be children; but in understanding, constancy and fortitude they should be men. While, as new born babes, they desire the sincere milk of the word, let them so use it as to grow thereby.

"Call no man your father on earth," says our Lord, "for one is your Father in heaven." Children have but little knowledge, and but a weak judgment. They are guided more by the opinions of others, than by personal conviction. They may be led right or wrong, according as the examples which they see, and the counsels which they hear, are good, or evil. They believe hastily, and act implicitly. They are governed by passion more than reason—by feeling more than judgment.—Now, in distinction from this childish temper, be ye fully persuaded in your own minds. Judge for yourselves what is right. Prove all things, and hold fast that which is good. Make the word of truth, not the opinions of men, the rule of your faith and conduct. Follow no man blindly, but look well to

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your goings. Judge of truth and error—of right and wrong, not by your occasional feelings, or the current of your affections; but by the calm and sober exercise of your understanding.

2. The Apostle cautions us, that we be *not tossed to and fro*, like a ship rolling on the waves. "He that wavereth," says Saint James, "is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed. Let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord. The doubleminded man is unstable in all his ways." In opposition to this unstable, fluctuating temper, we are required to "hold fast the profession of our faith, without wavering."

The man who, without principle, knowledge and judgment, assumes the high profession of the Christian, may appear steady in a calm season: But, in times of temptation, he will be like a ship without pilot, anchor or ballast, tossed about by the power of a tempest. He is at the mercy of every rude gust. He is driven in any direction, as the wind happens to blow. He is elevated high, or sunk low, as the waves rise or fall. He makes no port; but floating at large, on the troubled element, he is, every moment, in danger of shipwreck.

The Christian, who embarks for the heavenly world, must consider, that the ocean on which he sails, is subject to changing winds, and perilous storms. He must not promise himself smooth waters, soft gales and clear skies; but go provided for all kinds of weather. The word of truth must be his compass, and faith his pilot; hope must be his anchor, and knowledge and good works his ballast; prudence must keep the watch, and sober reason hold the helm. Thus he may sail with safety in all seasons.

3. We must *not be carried about with every wind of doctrine.*

False doctrines, like winds, are blustering and unsteady. They blow from no certain point; but in all

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directions; and they frequently, and sometimes suddenly, shift their course. They make great noise and bustle, disturb the atmosphere, and, by their violent motions, they spread confusion and ruin. Light bodies are easily taken up and driven about by every wind that blows. The gale which cleanses the wheat, disperses the chaff. The deep rooted oak stands firm in its place, while the dry leaves beneath it are caught up, wafted around, and made the sport of every gust. So the sincere Christian, rooted and grounded in the truth, and grown up to maturity in faith and knowledge, is stedfast in his religion, whatever storms may assault him. He remains in his place, whatever winds may blow. But the light and chaffy Christian: the hypocritical, unprincipled professor, is easily carried about by divers and strange doctrines. He shifts his course and changes his direction, as the wind of popular opinion happens to drive.

If we would be constant in our religion, we must be rooted in faith and love.

4. The Apostle warns us, that we are in danger from *the sleight of men, and the cunning craftiness whereby they lie in wait to deceive.*

The true ministers of Christ use great plainness of speech, and by manifestation of the truth commend themselves to the consciences of men. Corrupt teachers use sleight and craft, that they may ensnare the simple, and decoy the unsuspecting, and thus make proselytes to their party.

Christians should beware of evil workers, and watch against their dishonest arts. That they may escape the dangers to which they are exposed in corrupt times, they must attend to the plain and obvious precepts and doctrines of the gospel, make these their rule, and consent to no opinion, or practice inconsistent with them, however plausibly it may be recommended. They must furnish themselves with such knowledge in divine

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things, as to discern the designs, and escape the artifice of evil men and seducers.

That Christians may the better secure themselves from seduction, the gospel has warned them of the various crafts of those who lie in wait for them.

Deceivers come in sheep's clothing; with an ostentation of uncommon humility, meekness and heavenliness; but inwardly, they are ravening wolves, whose real aim is to scarter and devour the sheep.

They are deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ and ministers of righteousness; and thus corrupting men from the simplicity that is in Christ; even as Satan transformed himself into an angel of light, and through his subtlety beguiled Eve from her fidelity to God. Like him, they make cautious advances, not alarming men, at first, by the grossest errors; but leading them along, step by step, from smaller errors to greater. Thus they wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.

They practice not their arts directly on those, who, by reason of use, have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil; but they beguile unstable souls, deceive the hearts of the simple, creep into houses and lead captive the more tender sex, and, by their means, subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake.

Such teachers discover a peculiar malignity against the true ministers of Christ. Paul speaking to the Galatians concerning the deceivers who were among them, says, "They zealously affect you, but not well; they would exclude us, that you might affect them." These crafty and designing preachers appeared among the Corinthians. There they represented Paul as making the gospel burdensome, while they preached it freely, and without a reward. And yet the reverse was true. They, by their insidious arts, devoured those among whom they went, and even brought them into bondage, while Paul preached the gospel without

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charge; and though he asserted his right to live of the gospel, yet he waved the right, or used it with such moderation, as to give no cause of complaint.

Deceivers are confined to no sphere, and governed by no rule; but stretch themselves beyond their line, enter into other men's labors, and build on another man's foundation. Thus they cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine of peace and unity which the churches have received.

They pretend to superior sanctity, and say to others, "Stand by yourselves, come not near to us; for we are holier than you;" when, in reality, "they who thus separate themselves, are sensual, and have not the Spirit."

They are watchful to take advantage of any unhappy circumstance in a church, such as the discipline of an offender, the death of a minister, or accidental contention, and, by such means, to introduce and establish themselves. Paul says to the Ephesians, among whom he had preached for several years, "I know that, *after my departure*, shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock; yea, even of your own selves shall men arise speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them."

Such teachers labor to unsettle men's minds from the established order of the gospel, and to prejudice them against the regular maintenance of the ministry, representing all order in churches as tyranny, and all stated provision for the ministry, as oppression. They promise men liberty; but are themselves the servants of corruption. They speak evil of things which they understand not, and allure through the lusts of the flesh, those who were clean escaped from them who live in error.

The gospel has thus particularly informed us of the cunning craftiness of those who lie in wait to deceive, that we may not be led away by the error of the wicked, nor fall from our own stedfastness.

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We have considered the negative part of the description given of the mature Christian.

We will now, secondly, attend to the positive part. The Christian, "speaking the truth in love, should grow up in all things into Christ."

1. We must "speak the truth in love;" or "be sincere in love;" as the margin reads. The word is of an extensive signification. It imports, to receive, retain and obey the truth, as well as to speak or profess it. Particularly;

We should acquire a good *doctrinal knowledge* of the truth as it is in Jesus. We should examine the evidences of our religion, that we may be able to give an answer to every man who asks the reason of our faith; and we should acquaint ourselves with the doctrines and precepts of the gospel, that we may discern things which differ, and approve those that are excellent.

We should be well *established* in the truth. The Apostle tells the Corinthians, "His preaching was not with enticing words of men's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, that their faith might not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God." He expresses his desire for the Colossians, "that they might attain to the full assurance of understanding in the acknowledgment of the gospel, lest any man should beguile them with enticing words." He rejoiced to "behold their order, and the stedfastness of their faith in Christ." And he exhorts them to "walk in Christ, rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith, as they have been taught."

We should see that our hearts are *conformed* to the truth. One may have a good knowledge of the evidences and doctrines of the gospel, and yet be a stranger to the power of it. Such a man is liable to be carried about with every wind of doctrine, and to make shipwreck of his faith, in tempestuous seasons. Our best security against this danger, is a heart established with grace. "Take heed," says Saint Peter, "lest,

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being led away with the error of the wicked, ye fall from your own stedfastness; but grow in grace, and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ." One who has felt the transforming power of the gospel, has a witness in himself, that it is true, he knows it must be from God, because it inculcates that purity, righteousness, benevolence, humility, meekness, temperance and universal rectitude, which must always be approvable in the sight of a holy and perfect Being; and in proportion as he finds more of these tempers in himself, he has clearer evidence, that the gospel has come to him with divine power. He will not be persuaded to renounce a dispensation, which God has so manifestly owned. He will not suspect those doctrines to be false, which have so powerful a tendency to make him like to God. He will not receive as truth, any thing which he perceives to be of an opposite tendency. He loves the commandment, because it is holy—he loves the truth, because it gives power to the commandment.

We must *walk* in the truth. The reason why some so easily turn from the truth, and run greedily in the ways of error, is because they are not *governed* by the truth which they profess to believe. Though in words they acknowledge it, they deny it in practice: and finding themselves condemned by it, they conceive an enmity against it. When they have begun to depart from the order, and the doctrine which is after godliness, they find new temptations to depart farther still. One error introduces another, and they wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.

2. As we must adhere to the truth, so we must "grow up in all things into Christ, who is the head."

Christ is the *head* of believers. They must be conformed to him; have the same mind, which was in him; and walk as he walked.

They must *grow up* into him. They are here in a state of imperfection. They, at present, fall much be-

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low the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ. They must endeavor to be continually growing, and aspire after a more complete and perfect manhood.

They must grow *in all things*. A partial religion is not that which the gospel teaches. We must have respect to the whole character of Christ—to the whole compass of duty—to every known doctrine and precept of scripture. We must aim to stand perfect and complete in all the will of God—to walk worthy of him unto all pleasing, and to be fruitful in every good work. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away; all things are become new." A hypocrite may seem to grow in some things, while he is destitute of the main things, which belong to religion. He may abound in knowledge; but he fails in practice. He may have much zeal; but he has no humility. He may be warm in his devotions; but he is cold in his charity. He may pretend to a strong faith; but he is void of real holiness. He may talk much about religion; but he does little. He may express much joy in Christ, and comfort of hope; but he is full of love to the world, and a stranger to contentment and patience. He may be severe against other men's sins; but he excuses his own. He may pretend a high love to God, and an ardent desire of heaven; but still he indulges his earthly passions, and ungodly lusts.

Such is the hypocrite. The sincere Christian is not like him. He, having received the truth in love, grows up into Christ *in all things*. All the graces of the gospel unite in forming his temper. They all operate in harmony. His religion is one continued, uniform, consistent work.

I proceed now to the other branch of our subject, which is to shew how the Christian attains to this maturity. It is by union with Jesus Christ, "from whom the whole body compacted and cemented together by every joint of supply, according to its power in the pro-



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portion of every part, maketh increase of the body to the edifying of itself in love."

From the growth of the human body the Apostle borrows a similitude to illustrate the spiritual growth of the Christian church.

The head is the principal part of the body. Here is the seat of spirit and life. Hence nourishment and animation are conveyed to, and diffused through the whole body, by means of the communication which there is among all the parts, each part assisting the distribution according to its measure and office. If the intercourse between the head and any member was cut off—if any channel of supply failed in its operation, a langour and decay would immediately ensue.

In order to the growth of the body, there must be, not only a union with the head, but a communication through all the parts. The several members and vessels must reciprocate with one another.

So it is in the spiritual body. Christians must be united by faith unto Christ the head, who filleth all in all. They must keep up an intercourse with him by prayer and an attendance on his ordinances. It is as absurd to expect growth in knowledge and holiness, without the means instituted for the edifying of the body of Christ, as it would be to expect the growth of a natural body without supplies of food. While we attend on these external means, we must look to Christ for the supply of the Spirit; for it is the Spirit that quickeneth. It is his kindly influence, which renders divine ordinances effectual to our nourishment and increase.

As there must be a communion with the head, so there must be an intercourse between the several parts, in order to the growth of the body. The members of Christ, who are by faith united to him, must also by mutual love be united to one another, that spiritual nourishment may be properly distributed. The whole body,

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compacted by every joint of supply, must experience an effectual working in the measure of every part.

Christians are to seek, not merely their own, but the common edification. They are to comfort and encourage, to exhort and assist one another. They are to agree together in prayer and praise, in hearing the word, and attending on ordinances. They are, by mutual example and friendly discourse, to animate and strengthen one another. They should have the same care and attention one for another, as the members of a natural body. If one member suffer, all should feel for it. If one be honored, all should rejoice with it. Thus the body will make increase to the edifying of itself in love.

It is remarkable, and it cannot be too often noticed, that whenever the Apostle speaks of Christain growth and edification, he points out *love*, *peace*, *unity*, as the main thing in which this edification must appear. "Speaking the truth in *love*, grow up into Christ."—"The body is edified *in love*."—"Study the things which make for *peace*, and the things wherewith ye may edify *one another*."—"Let the body be *joined together* and *compacted*, that it may make increase."—"Let your *love* abound more and more."—"Abound in *love* one toward another, and toward all men."

This is the Apostle's favorite theme.

1. We see then, that there can be no Christian growth, where Christian love is wanting.

Love is a principal grace—the end of the commandment—the bond of perfectness—the distinguishing mark of Christ's disciples—and a mean of improvement in all other graces. It is this which unites the several parts of the spiritual body, and maintains the communication between them, so that nourishment is ministered to them all.

2. We are here reminded, that Christians are bound to seek the peace, in order to the edification of the particular church, of which they are members. *These*

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the Apostle joins together. The latter cannot take place without the former. We must guard against every thing which tends to schism and disunion in the body; and prevent, as far as possible, those evils which would break the cohesion, or weaken the attraction, whereby its parts are held together. "Where envy and strife are, there is confusion and every evil work."

3. We learn from our subject, that no pretences of personal edification will justify our withdrawing from the communion of a church, in such a manner as would hinder the edification of our brethren. We are to be joined and compacted together, and thus to make increase. We are to look at the things of others, as well as at our own. We are, indeed, to edify ourselves; but our edification must be in *love*, as well as in other graces. And this love will excite us to study the things which make for the common edification. You think, perhaps, the word is dispensed more to your edification, or more to your taste, in some other place, than in the church with which you are immediately connected. It may be so: This is no improbable supposition. Preachers have different gifts, and hearers have different humors. One may relish this, and another that manner of preaching, though the same gospel is dispensed. Still you are not to withdraw from the assembly of your brethren, if your withdrawment would disturb the peace, and obstruct the edification of the church. You are to seek, not merely your own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved. Your spiritual growth depends on your union with Christ, the head; and on your communion with Christians, the members of the great body. Christ can make his gospel successful, though it be delivered by one, whose speech is called contemptible. You are then most likely to receive a blessing from your Lord, when you act in that spirit of love and condescension which he requires.

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Paul, Apollos and Cephas, all preached the same gospel; but each had his own peculiar manner of preaching. Paul was a strong reasoner; Apollos was an eloquent orator; Peter was a warm and affectionate speaker. They all had their admirers in Corinth. One said, I am of Paul; another, I am of Apollos; and another, I am of Peter. Paul reproved this party attachment, as an indication, that they were carnal; that they were, as children, governed more by natural humor, than by spiritual understanding. "While one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos, are ye not carnal? Who is Paul, or Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? Paul planted, and Apollos watered; but God gave the increase."

As Christians have been called of God to the fellowship of his Son, they should all speak the same thing; they should be joined together in the same mind, and in the same judgment; and there should be no divisions among them.

Since Christ has appointed the gospel ministry for the edification of his body, let us meekly, humbly and prayerfully attend upon it, as his institution; keeping in view its important end, endeavoring to grow thereby, and desiring to come in the unity of faith and knowledge, unto the stature of perfect men.

Finally, beloved brethren, build yourselves up on your most holy faith, pray in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, and wait for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, unto eternal life.

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# SERMON XXV.

## *Christians to be distinguished from the World.*

EPHESIANS iv. 17, 18, 19.

*This I say therefore and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart, who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.*

THESE Ephesians, you will remember, had lately been called out of a state of Heathenism to the knowledge and profession of the religion of Jesus. In the verses immediately preceding the text, the apostle observes to them, that God had brought them within his church, and had admitted them to the privilege of the gospel ministry, which was given by Jesus Christ, at the time of his ascension, for the edifying of his church, till all should come to full maturity in religion, that they might no more be children, tossed about by the artifice of deceivers; but might be men grown up in all things to the resemblance of Christ; and, being united to him by faith, and joined one to another by love, might derive spiritual influence from him, and charitable assistance from their brethren, and so make continual increase in every virtue and good work.

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Now since they had experienced so great a change in their condition, and were placed under such superior advantages, the apostle earnestly exhorts them, that, in all their conversation, they would distinguish themselves from other Gentiles, and would walk worthy of their high character and calling.

The manner in which other Gentiles still walked, and in which they themselves had once walked, he describes in the words which have been read. They lived in the vanity of their mind—were darkened in their understanding—alienated from the life of God through their ignorance and hardness of heart—and, being past feeling, had given themselves over to work all uncleanness with greediness.

While we contemplate the manner in which these Gentiles walked, we shall see how converts *ought* to walk; for the apostle here holds up to view the conversation of the former, for a warning to the latter. "I testify in the Lord, that henceforth ye walk not as other Gentiles walk."

1. These Gentiles walked *in the vanity of their mind.* The apostle Peter, describing the corruptions of the Heathens, says, "They walked in abominable idolatries."

The false deities, which the Gentiles worshiped, are often called *vanities.* The apostles preached, "that they should turn from *these vanities* to the living God, who made heaven and earth." On account of their worshipping these vanities, the apostle says, "They became *vain in their imaginations*, and their *foolish* heart was darkened; professing themselves to be wise, they became *fools*, and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like unto corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts and creeping things; wherefore God gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts—and to vile affections and a reprobate mind, to do things which were not seemly."

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The prevalence of idolatry in the world is a melancholy proof of the depravity of human nature. The apostle says, "The invisible things of God, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things which are made, even his eternal power and Godhead."—That which may be known of God was manifest even to the Heathens, for God had shewed it to them, so that they were without excuse." The reason why they changed the truth of God into a lie was not because God had left himself without witness; but because they did not like to retain him in their knowledge. Displeased with the idea of one God in whom all perfections met, and on whom all things depended, they invented gods many, and lords many, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, ascribing to each deity properties suited to their own vain imaginations. The Psalmist resolves the atheism of the world into the same cause. "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God. They are corrupt; they have done abominable works; there is none that doeth good."

Atheism and idolatry proceed not from the want of sufficient evidence, that there is one eternal, all perfect Being; but from that corruption of heart which blinds the understanding and perverts the judgment.

We, who have enjoyed the light of revelation, easily see the absurdity of worshipping the sun and moon, the ghosts of departed heroes, or images formed by art and man's device. There is, however, a species of idolatry, less gross indeed in appearance, but equally fatal in its consequences, which still prevails even among the enlightened part of mankind. The love of this world, and the serving of divers lusts and pleasures the gospel condemns as idolatry, warning us, that for these things' sake cometh the wrath of God on the children of disobedience.

We then, who enjoy the light, are not only to acknowledge one all perfect Deity, in opposition to

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Heathen idolatry; but to love him with all our heart, to serve him with a willing mind, to seek his favor with supreme desire, and to resign ourselves to his will without reserve, in opposition to spiritual idolatry. If we transfer to earthly objects the regards, which are due only to him, we are as really guilty of idolatry, as they who worship an image.

2. The Heathens were *darkened in their understanding*.

The understanding is that faculty, by which we view and compare things, discern truth from error, and distinguish between moral good and evil. It is to the mind, what the eye is to the body. The eye is that organ, which, receiving the light of the sun, beholds, through this medium, surrounding objects, and distinguishes one from another. The understanding is that faculty, which receives the knowledge of moral things, and discerns their relations and differences.

In these Heathens the understanding was darkened —not in respect of natural things; for, in useful arts and liberal sciences, many of them greatly excelled— but in respect of moral truth and obligation. Here, professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.

Their darkness was owing, not solely to the want of revelation, but also to the want of an honest and good heart. The apostle says, "They knew not what might have been known of God."—"They understood not what God had shewed them."

There are those under the gospel, who, through carelessness and inattention, live criminally ignorant of the plain and important doctrines of religion. The apostle says to the Corinthians, "Some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame." He reproves the Hebrews, because "they were dull of hearing; and when, for the time, they ought to have been teachers of others, they still had need, that one should teach them again, what were the first principles of the oracles of God."



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If the ignorance of the Heathens was, in any degree, to be imputed to their own corrupt hearts, How great is the corruption, and how aggravated the guilt of those, who, under the gospel, remain ignorant of the things which essentially relate to their duty and salvation?

Farther: The understanding is darkened in some, who have a superior knowledge of religion. There are those, "who seeing, do not perceive; and hearing, do not understand; whose heart is waxed gross, and who have closed their eyes, lest they should see with their eyes, and understand with their heart, and should turn, and be healed."

Some, who under the advantages of a good education, acquire a competent knowledge of religious truths, are still blind and insensible to the excellence and importance of those truths, and are no more governed by them, than if they had never learned them. To such may be applied what the apostle says to the Corinthians: "The natural," or sensual, "man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned." Men of sensual and vicious minds, after all their knowledge, may be said to be in darkness, because they know nothing yet as they ought to know. Their knowledge descends not into their hearts to influence their tempers and direct their actions, but it lies useless in their heads.

When such as these are recovered from a state of sin, though they should acquire no new knowledge of the doctrines and precepts of the gospel, yet they may be said to be enlightened, because they have new apprehensions of divine things, see them in a more convincing light, attend to them with greater earnestness, and feel from them a more powerful influence. Religion consists not merely in a knowledge of, and assent to divine truths; but in such a conformity of heart to their nature and design, and in such a view of

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their reality and importance, as will bring the whole man under their government.

3. These Ephesians, *were alienated* in their Heathen state, *from the life of God, through the ignorance that was in them, because of the blindness*, or hardness, *of their heart.*

By *the life of God* is intended a *holy* and *spiritual* life. This is called *the life of God*, because it consists in a conformity to his character, and leads to the enjoyment of his favor. The Christian, renewed after the image of God, lives no longer to the lusts of men, but to the will of God. He fashions not himself according to his former lusts in his ignorance, but as God, who has called him is holy, so is he holy in all manner of conversation.

These Ephesians were once alienated from such a life, and their unconverted neighbors were so still. They walked according to the course of the world; not according to the will of God. They fulfilled the desires of the flesh; not the dictates of the Spirit.

This part of the character of the Heathen world is applicable to every habitual sinner. Our apostle says to the Romans, "The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor, indeed, can be."—"They, who are in the flesh," under the government of fleshly lusts, and vicious habits, "cannot please God." To the Collossians he says, "You, who were sometime alienated, and enemies in your minds by wicked works, he hath now reconciled." St. James says, "The friendship of the world is enmity with God. Whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God."

True religion consists in the conformity, wickedness in the contrariety of the soul to the character and will of God. Every habitual sinner is alienated from, and an enemy to God: He possesses those tempers, and does those works, which are opposite to the divine nature; and condemned by the divine law. In this

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alienation from God greatly consists the evil of sin; and from this also principally arises its danger. Hence appears the importance of an immediate repentance; for as long as the sinner continues in the love and practice of iniquity, he is an enemy to God, lies under his displeasure, and is exposed to his wrath. By the actual turning of the heart from sin to God, and by the subsequent works of holiness, the Christian must judge of the sincerity of his repentance, and the reality of his pardon. The true penitent loves and follows that life of God, to which once he was disaffected, and from which he was alienated.

This alienation, the apostle says, was "through the ignorance, which proceeded from the blindness, or hardness of the heart."

Particular wrong actions may, in many cases, be excused on the ground of unavoidable ignorance. But that ignorance which is the effect of hardness of heart cannot be admitted as an excuse. The apostle here mentions ignorance as an aggravation; not as an extenuation of the guilt of these Gentiles: for this ignorance had its foundation in the obstinacy and perverseness of the mind. Such a kind of ignorance, being in itself criminal, will not excuse the sins which follow from it.

Though ignorance may be pleaded in excuse or extenuation of some particular actions, yet an habitual alienation from virtue, and a customary devotedness to a vicious life can never avail itself of this plea. An honest man may misjudge concerning the propriety of certain instances of conduct: But the difference between virtue and vice in general is obvious to the reason, and palpable to the conscience of every man, who is not grossly blinded by his lusts, and hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. The apostle says concerning the Gentiles in general, "These, having not the law, are a law unto themselves; which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bear-

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ing witness, and their thoughts, the mean while, accusing, or else excusing one another."

Now *if their* alienation from a virtuous life was without excuse, what excuse will be found for those, who, under the gospel, walk as the Gentiles walked? If they, who sinned against the law of nature, could not plead ignorance in bar of punishment; what will those plead who have sinned against the gospel? If the ignorance of the former was imputed to the hardness of their hearts; to what more favorable cause can be imputed the ignorance of some, and the disobedience of others, under the purest light of revelation? The Heathens had some apprehension of the judgment of God against many of the sins which they practised; but by the gospel the wrath of God is clearly revealed from heaven against *all* ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness. God will finally judge all men according to the works which they have done, and the light which they have enjoyed. They who have sinned without law, shall perish without law; and as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law; and such as have rejected the gospel, shall be condemned by the gospel. They who have known, and yet have not obeyed it, will be punished with everlasting destruction from the glory of God's almighty power.

4. It is added, *They were become past feeling.* This same temper is elsewhere expressed by *a conscience seared with a hot iron.*

There is in all men a principle of conscience, which, when doctrinally enlightened, approves virtue and condemns vice. This principle will operate, in a greater or less degree, until, by repeated opposition, it is silenced and subdued. In the first stages of wickedness, the sinner, reflecting on his guilty life, feels shame and remorse, self-condemnation and the fear of punishment. A dreadful sound is in his ears; destruction from the Lord is a terror to him. There is no peace to the

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wicked; he is often a terror to himself. Cain, Herod and Judas felt the power of this inward principle.

There is, however, such a thing as a sinner's being past feeling. By a course of iniquity he acquires strong habits of vice: As vicious habits gain strength, fear, shame and remorse abate. Repeated violations of conscience blunt its sensibility and break its power. The sinner, bent on a wicked course, eagerly embraces licentious opinions, which flatter him in the pursuit. He may, at length, so pervert his judgment, as to confound the difference between moral good and evil, and explode the idea of a future punishment. He says, in his heart, "God will not see it. How doth he know? Can he judge through the dark cloud?" When corrupt principles combine with vicious habits, they extinguish the sense of conscience. We read of some, who declare their sin as Sodom; who are not ashamed when they commit abomination, and whose glory is in their shame.

In opposition to this unfeeling mind, the renewed Christian has a tender, sensible conscience. The heart of stone is removed, and a heart of flesh is put within him. He is shocked with the deformity of vice—pleased with the beauty of holiness—affected with the remembrance of iniquity—awed by the authority—alarmed by the threatenings, and animated by the promises of God——studious to know what is right—cautious not to offend—watchful against temptations—afraid even of small transgressions—and careful, in cases of doubt, to choose the innocent side.

5. The Gentiles, being past feeling, *gave themselves over to lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.*

There are in men certain natural principles, such as fear, shame, a sense of honor and an apprehension of futurity, which operate as a check and restraint from vice. These, though in themselves too impotent to control the corrupt propensities of our fallen nature, yet

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are of use to set some bounds to iniquity, and to keep the world in order; and, when they are aided and directed by a superior principle of holiness, they are great helps to the religious life. Let these principles be extinguished, or perverted, and what restraint will the sinner be under? He will commit iniquity with greediness. Thus St. Peter describes the character of the Gentiles, "They walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings and abominable idolatries; and thought it strange that Christians ran not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of them." St Paul says, "They were filled with all unrighteousness, uncleanness, covetousness and wickedness; and though they knew the judgment of God, that they who did such things were worthy of death, they not only did the same, but consented to, and had pleasure in those who did them."

The gospel sets before us far more powerful arguments against a wicked life, than nature could suggest to the Heathens. If we break over the restraints which the gospel lays upon us, and mock the terrors which it holds up to our view, we not only discover a greater vitiosity of mind than they, but shall run to greater lengths in the practice of iniquity.

As water, when it has broken through its mounds, rushes on with more impetuous force, than the natural stream; so the corruptions of the human heart, when they have borne down the restraints of religion, press forward with more violent rapidity, and make more awful devastation in the soul, than where these restraints had never been known. Sin takes occasion by the commandment to work all manner of concupiscence.

Where the gospel has no salutary effect, it is a savour of death unto death. The apostle speaks of such uncleanness among the Christians in Corinth, as had not been known among the Heathens. The greater knowledge in religion men acquire, while their hearts are set in them to do evil, the more capable are

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they of wickedness. When they have once trampled on the motives to piety and virtue which the gospel offers, their repentance, in human view, becomes more difficult and improbable, because no new motives can be placed before them. If they turn from the holy commandment delivered to them, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.

A few reflections here offer themselves to you.

1. You see how extremely dangerous it is, to continue in sin under the gospel. While you do so, you act in opposition to the most powerful motives, that ever have been, or can be proposed to the human mind; and therefore are filling up the measure of your sins with amazing rapidity, that wrath may come upon you to the uttermost.

Sin, in its own nature, is exceedingly heinous. It acquires a peculiar criminality in those, who practice it in opposition to the light which the gospel affords, the terrors which it denounces, and the calls which it sends. The indulgence of it hardens the heart more awfully, and leads to a more dreadful issue, than under circumstances of inferior light. If he who despised Moses's law, died without mercy—of how much sorer punishment shall they be thought worthy, who have trodden under foot the Son of God?

2. You see that you have need to guard against the beginnings of sin.

Vice indulged lays waste the conscience, blinds the understanding, perverts the judgment, hardens the heart, and may bring the sinner to such a state, that he will be without feeling. It is madness to venture on a vicious course at all. You now feel a timidity in vice; conscience reproves you; fear checks you; shame restrains you: But you know not how soon you may break down all these barriers, and commit iniquity with greediness; therefore now turn your feet into the paths of virtue. Make haste, delay not any longer, lest you become so entangled in your evil habits, that you can-

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not cease from sin. "His own iniquities shall take the wicked himself; he shall be holden in the cords of his sin; he shall die without instruction, and in the greatness of his folly he shall go astray."

3. My Christian friends, consider, what you once were, that you may be humble for your past sins, thankful for recovering grace, careful to walk in newness of life, and prayerful for those who are still in their guilt. The apostle cautions the Ephesian converts, that henceforth they walk not as other Gentiles. He reminds them that in time past, they had so walked. He would have them know what religion is, and make it appear, by the change in their lives, that they had experienced its transforming power. Absurd is it to pretend, that we are the subjects of a real conversion, if still we live according to the course of the world, and walk according to our former lusts.

4. Christians must be watchful, lest they be led away by the influence of corrupt examples. "Walk not," says the apostle, "as other Gentiles walk."—Keep yourselves from the vices of an untoward generation. "Be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation."—"Sleep not as do others, but watch and be sober."

5. Religion lies much in the temper of the mind.

It is the opposite to that character of the Heathens, which the text describes. It implies just apprehensions of, and pious affections to God; an influential knowledge of divine truth; a zeal for a godly life; a tenderness of conscience; a hatred of sin; and a resolution for every duty. To judge then, whether we are really religious, we must look into our hearts, examine our tempers, and observe the tendency of our thoughts, and the motion of our affections.

Finally: Since God has placed us under the dispensation of the gospel, which teaches us the life of godliness, and urges it by the most powerful motives,



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let us not walk, as others walk, who being blinded in their understanding, alienated from the life of God, hardened in their heart, and stupified in their conscience, have given themselves over to work iniquity with greediness; but having been taught, as the truth is in Jesus, let us put off the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness; and let us walk worthy of him, who has called us to his eternal glory by Jesus Christ.

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# SERMON XXVI.

## *Renovation after the Image of God.*

EPHESIANS iv. 20——24.

*But ye have not so learned Christ; if so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus; that ye put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt, according to the deceitful lusts; and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.*

THE true happiness of man consists in the favor and enjoyment of God. Of this happiness fallen man is incapable, until he has become the subject of a moral change. What this change is, the apostle clearly instructs us in our text. To the several things contained in the passage now read, I shall endeavor to lead your attention.

I. The change here spoken of is radically seated in the mind. *Ye have been taught——that ye be renewed in the spirit of your mind.*

It is not assuming the name and badge of the Christian; joining ourselves to this, or that religious sect; or even reforming the outward manners; but it is a renewal of the temper and disposition of the soul, which qualifies us for, and entitles us to the happiness of the heavenly world. This is elsewhere in scripture ex-

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pressed by a *new creature—newness of Spirit—a new heart—and the renewing of the mind.*

These terms do not import the creation of new powers and faculties, but the introduction of new tempers and qualities. The apostasy has not extinguished, but perverted the natural faculties; and renovation does not introduce a new set of faculties, but it gives a holy direction to those which already exist.

It enlightens the eyes of the understanding, and gives new apprehensions of divine things. The doctrinal knowledge, and speculative sentiments, may still be the same as before; for the Apostle supposes, that a man may have all knowledge, and understand all mysteries, and yet not have charity; but the things before known are now viewed in a new manner; they are spiritually discerned; they appear real, excellent and important, and thus obtain a commanding influence on the heart and life.

This renovation takes away the stony heart and gives a heart of flesh; a tender sensible heart—a heart which feels divine truths, is afraid of sin, is jealous of itself, stands in awe of God's judgments, and trembles at his word.

It subdues the carnal mind, which is enmity against God, and brings in its place the spiritual mind which is subject to his law. It casts down imaginations, and every high thing, which exalts itself against the knowledge of God; and captivates every thought to the obedience of Christ.

It purifies the affections, and directs them to their their proper objects. Love and desire no longer centre in things below; but they rise to things above. The character of God appears amiable, his laws just, his grace wonderful, and heaven supremely desirable. Sin appears hateful, as it is contrary to the nature and command of God, and ruinous to the soul. The world and all its interests appear contemptible, in com-

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parison with the excellency of those glories which the gospel reveals.

There are new purposes and resolutions. Or if there had been some similar resolutions before, they were not formed on the same rational and holy views; but more on a principle of fear; and chiefly on worldly motives; and therefore were weak, wavering and transient. These new resolutions arise from a view of the hateful nature, as well as fatal tendency of sin, and the real excellence and vast importance of religion; and therefore are strong and permanent. This is the language of the renewed soul, "I will not offend any more; that which I see not teach thou me; if I have done iniquity, I will do no more."—"Teach me the way of thy statutes, and I will keep it to the end. Give me understanding, and I will keep thy law; yea, I will observe it with my whole heart."

II. He who is renewed in the spirit of his mind, *puts off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt, according to the deceitful lusts.*

The new spirit is opposite to sin, and strives against it. As the motions of sin work in the corrupt heart to bring forth fruit unto death, so grace works in the renewed heart to bring forth fruit unto holiness.

The new creature immediately applies itself to subdue the lusts of the flesh, and the corrupt habits and dispositions of the mind. The Apostle says to the Corinthians. "In that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you? Yea, what vehement desire—what fear—what indignation—what revenge?"

The Colossians, having put off the old man, are exhorted, "to mortify their members, which are on the earth, such as uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness which is idolatry." These corruptions indeed, are not wholly *extinguished* in the renewed Christian; but the *power* of them is

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broken, so that they no more have dominion over him. He carries on a warfare against them. He keeps his heart with diligence, brings his body into subjection, and abstains from fleshly lusts which war against the soul.

A special reason why he mortifies the affections and lusts of the flesh, is because he has found them *deceitful*. They have promised those pleasures in the indulgence, which he has never found; and have produced those painful consequences, and tormenting reflections which he little expected. He feels the force of the Apostle's expostulation, "What fruit had ye then in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death."

As these deceitful lusts corrupt the conversation, so, when he mortifies these, he of course puts off his former conversation, which is here called the *old man*: and elsewhere, *the old man with his deeds—the deeds of the body, and the members which are on the earth*. He, in deliberate and hearty purpose, renounces all sin. He watches against it, and against the temptations which have often beset him, and prevailed over him. He abstains from the appearance of evil. And if he is drawn away of his lusts and enticed, he thinks on his ways with godly sorrow, and turns his feet into God's testimonies with new resolutions to keep himself, and fervent supplications for grace to help in time of need.

III. The renewed Christian not only puts off the old man, but *puts on the new man*.

As the former signifies a corrupt temper and conversation, so the latter must intend a holy and virtuous disposition and character. The new man is *renewed in righteousness and true holiness*. The true convert not only ceases to do evil, but learns to do well.

Religion is not merely a negative thing, consisting in the absence of evil dispositions and works; it includes also positive goodness, a direct love of God, and a care to obey his commands. The Apostle makes a

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distinction between a *righteous*, and a *good* man. "Scarcely for a *righteous* man will one die, yet peradventure for a *good* man some would even dare to die." By the former he intends one who leads merely a harmless life—who simply does no injuries, no wrongs? By the latter he means one who is useful to those around him—one who, governed by a disinterested benevolence, is careful to maintain those works which are good and profitable to men. The slothful servant was condemned, not because he had been mischievous, but because he had been unprofitable—not because he had destroyed his talent, or had employed it in an unjust and fraudulent manner, but because he had laid it by in a napkin, and returned it without improvement. Of Onesimus, after his conversion, Paul says to Philemon, "He in time past was unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and me." In the story of the Jew who fell among thieves, and was left wounded on the road, we see the priest and Levite passing by him with an unfeeling neglect; and the kind Samaritan assisting and relieving him in his helpless condition. The former are not charged with robbing or wounding him, but only with inattention and indifference to his case; yet, they acted not the part of neighbors. It was the Samaritan only who was neighbor to him; for he it was who shewed mercy on him. In the description of the final judgment we hear the judge condemning the wicked, not for positive injuries, but for the neglect of positive duties. He does not say, ye have taken away my food and raiment, driven me from my dwelling, wounded, or imprisoned me; but he says, "I was hungry, and ye gave me no meat; thirsty, and ye gave me no drink; naked, and ye clothed me not; sick and in prison and ye did not visit me.

If we would know, whether we have been the subjects of this great change, which qualifies for heaven, we must examine, not only what our disposition is

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and to walk in love, and to be merciful as he is merciful. As a reason why we should love one another, the Apostle says, "Love is of God; and every one that loveth, is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love; and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him."

The new man is created after God *in holiness*. God is of purer eyes than to behold evil. He cannot look on iniquity, nor so much as be tempted of evil. The new man, in this respect bears the image of God. He has a prevailing hatred of sin, and love of moral rectitude. He cannot bear that which is evil. When he is tempted to any known sin, the holy principle within him, if it be in its proper exercise, will exclaim, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God;"—"How shall one who is dead to sin, live any longer therein?" Hence he is said to be a partaker of God's holiness—to be holy as God is holy.

"The Lord is a God of *truth*," and "it is impossible for him to lie." In conformity to this character, his people are called "children who will not lie." The Apostle says to the Ephesian converts, "Ye have been taught, that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in true holiness or holiness of truth, therefore put away lying, and speak ye every man truth to his neighbor." And to the Colossians he says, "Lie not one to another, seeing ye have put off the old man with his deeds." He who shall enter into God's holy hill, is one that "speaketh the truth in his heart, and, though he swears to his own hurt, yet he changes not."

In these respects, the true Christian is renewed after the image of God.

We see what is the main substance of religion. It is not meat and drink, rites and forms; but righteousness and truth, goodness and mercy, peace and love. If religion consists in a conformity to God, these must be its leading characters, for these are his moral perfections.

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We see also that there is an essential connexion between piety to God, and the duties which we owe to men; for it is in these that we imitate God, and express our love to him. To love God is to love his moral perfections, justice, goodness, truth and faithfulness? and these are in us the social virtues. To make light of these is to treat the divine character with contempt. "If therefore a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother, whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from him, that he who loveth God, love his brother also." I proceed to observe,

V. That this great change in the man is effected by means of the gospel. The Apostle says, *Ye have heard Christ, and been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus, that ye put off the old man, and put on the new.* This change was the consequence of their having learned Christ.

Renovation is indeed here supposed to be the work of God. The new man is said to be "created after God in true holiness; and to be renewed after the image of him who created him." And elsewhere it is more expressly ascribed to the divine agency. "We are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to good works."—"We are saved by the renewing of the Holy Ghost."—"We are born of the Spirit." All the virtues of the Christian temper are "the fruits of the Spirit."

To define the manner in which the Spirit of God works on the human mind in effecting this change, is beyond our sphere. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and we hear the sound thereof, but cannot tell, whence it cometh, nor whether it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." But whatever be the manner of his operation, it does not exclude the use and influence of means.

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Christians are renewed *in knowledge*. They escape the pollutions of the world *through the knowledge of Christ*. They are chosen to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit, and *belief of the truth*. They are begotten *by the word of truth*, and born of *incorruptible seed*, even of *the word of God*, which liveth and abideth forever. God hath given us all things, which pertain to a godly life *through the knowledge of him*, who hath called us to glory and virtue. Paul preached to the Gentiles, that he might *open their eyes*, and turn them *from darkness to light*, and from the power of Satan to God.

Whether the Spirit of God, in the renovation of the soul, works immediately on the will, and, by a creative power, gives a new taste, and thus prepares the way for the word to have its sanctifying effect; or whether it first opens the understanding to discern the importance of divine truths, and thus gives them a transforming influence on the will and affections; or whether the heart and the intellect conjunctly are subjects of divine operation, are questions which may amuse a metaphysician, or philosopher, but they little concern the solicitous sinner, inquiring, what he must do to be saved, or the serious Christian examining the state of his own soul. What the great change is, which prepares us for heaven, the gospel has plainly stated; that the first production, and future improvement of this change is, in some way or other, the work of divine grace, we are expressly taught; that the Spirit of God, both in the conversion of sinners, and in the sanctification of believers, works on the soul by means of the word, and that by an attendance on the word, we are to seek and obtain the grace necessary for these purposes, we are fully assured. And what more need we to know? However those questions may be determined, our duty, and our encouragement remain the same. "Work out then your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who work-

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eth in you, both to will and to do, of his own good pleasure."

The promise of God, *A new heart will I give you, and a new Spirit will I put within you,* does not make void the commandment. *Cast away from you all your transgressions, and make you a new heart, and a new Spirit; for why will ye die?*

To distinguish between renovation and conversion, and to call the former the creative work of God, in which the subject is wholly passive; and the latter, altogether the work of man, in which he is wholly active, is a refinement in divinity, which the gospel has not taught, and by which, I am afraid, Christians are little edified. The scripture uses the terms, regeneration, repentance and conversion, to express the *whole* change requisite to eternal life; for with each of them eternal life stands connected. To this change, taken in its complete sense, the use of means, and the grace of God, are both necessary. The former is our duty —for the latter we must look to him. "Let us do all things without murmurings and disputings, that we may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke."

There is one observation more, which I will make on our text;

VI. That the change here spoken of is exceedingly great.

This, the terms used by our Apostle plainly import. It is *putting off the old man, which is corrupt, and putting on the new man, which is created after the image of God.*

The observable and sensible alteration in those converted from the ignorance, superstitions and vices of heathenism, was much greater, than that which takes place in such as have grown up in the knowledge of the gospel, and under the restraining influence of a virtuous education. But in the latter the change is great, though not attended with all the same remarkable cir-

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cumstances. The real nature and essence of conversion, is the same in all. It is a change of temper from the love of sin, to the love of God; and a correspondent change of life by forsaking the ways of sin, and turning the feet into God's testimonies.

Let none then imagine that they are the subjects of this change, merely because they entertain some new sentiments, feel transient emotions of the affections in their devotions, or have renounced some of their former guilty practices. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature; old things are passed away, and all things are become new:" It is a heart habitually conformed to God, and directed to keep all his commands, which proves that we have passed from death to life.

Some will, perhaps, here inquire, "If the change is so great as has been represented, must not every one who has been the subject of it, certainly know the reality, and even the very time of it?

This will not follow. The scripture supposes, that true Christians may want the full assurance of hope, and therefore directs them to seek it with diligence to the end; to examine themselves whether they are in the faith; and to fear, lest, a promise being left them, of entering into God's rest, they should seem to come short of it.

There is reason to believe, that some are renewed in their early childhood, before they have capacity distinctly to mark, or strength to retain the things which pass in their minds.

There are some, who, under the advantage of good instructions and examples, are, in a great measure, secured from the corruptions of the world, and the hardening influence of sin. These may be so gradually prepared for the change, and carried through it by such easy and gentle steps, that they can fix on no particular time, when it began, or when it was completed.

New converts are but babes in Christ. There is much corruption still remaining; and the principles of

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holiness are weak in their souls. Hence they see cause to call in question the reality of their conversion, till they have had time to prove it by its fruits; and even then, they may find it difficult to ascertain the time, when the change took place.

It may also be remarked, that there is a great difference between one's knowing, that there is an alteration in him, and knowing that this is a renovation in the Spirit of his mind. Every sinner, who, at adult age, is reclaimed from a life of gross wickedness, is sensible of a change. He is conscious of the awakenings and convictions which he feels, of the resolutions which he forms, and of the reformations which he makes; and he will probably remember them all his days; but till he has had time to bring forth, with patience, the fruits of repentance, he may remain in doubt, whether all this is the work of saving grace.

And even improved Christians may, through disorders of body, heavy afflictions, pressing temptations, or misapprehensions of the proper evidences of grace, labor under great bondage to fear, and walk in darkness and doubt much of their time; perhaps all their days.

These observations sufficiently shew, that however great the change of conversion may be in itself, the full assurance of hope is not immediately, or necessarily connected with it. The humble Christian, impressed with a sense of the importance of the change, and the awful consequences of a mistake, will be disposed to entertain a godly jealousy. He will keep under his body to bring it into subjection, lest by any means, after all his experience, and all his hope, he should finally be a cast away.

Let us then give all diligence to make our calling and election sure, and adopt the prayer of the Psalmist, "Search me, O God, and try my heart; prove me and know my thoughts, and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

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# SERMON XXVII.

## *Truth between Man and Man.*

EPHESIANS iv. 25.

*Wherefore, putting away Lying, speak every man Truth with his neighbor; for we are members one of another.*

ALL the graces of the Christian temper have a strict connexion. The renovation of our nature after the divine image lays the foundation for all holy exercises and works. Where this has taken place, there will be a prevailing opposition to sin of every kind, and a governing regard to the whole compass of christian virtues and duties. The apostle observes to the Ephesians, that, by the gospel, "they had been taught to put off the old man, which is corrupt according to *deceitful* lusts, to be renewed in the spirit of their mind, and to put on the new man, which, after God is created in righteousness and *true* holiness, or holiness of *truth*." But he would not have their religion end here. He reminds them that the tenor of their lives must correspond with this renovation; that they must no longer walk, like other Gentiles, in the vanity of their minds, but according to the pure precepts of that new religion, which they had embraced.

In our text and the verses following, he enumerates the several virtues and duties, which must appear in

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the life of the renewed Christian; such as veracity, meekness, justice, industry, purity of speech, kindness, chastity, &c. all which we shall consider in their order.

The virtue, which our text offers to consideration is *truth* or *veracity*, in opposition to *lying*. This naturally arose first to the Apostle's view from his description of the new man, as having put off *deceitful* lusts, and put on *true* holiness. We will,

I. Explain the duty here enjoined: "Speak every man *truth* with his neighbor."

II. Shew, that speaking truth is a necessary part of the Christian character. "Ye have been renewed—wherefore speak truth."

III. Apply the Apostle's argument: "For we are members one of another."

I. We will explain the duty here enjoined, which, for greater emphasis, the apostle expresses both negatively and positively. "Putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor."

*Truth* or veracity, as opposed to *lying*, is the agreement between our words and sentiments; as, on the contrary, lying is a disagreement between them, formed with a delusive intention. If by language, writing, or any known and agreed signs, we *purposely* convey to others false notions of things, we are guilty of that species of deception, which is commonly called lying. In opposition to this, we are to speak truth with our neighbors. In all our intercourse with one another, we are to express the real meaning of our hearts, and to convey, what we suppose to be, right ideas of those matters, which are the subjects of our discourse.

It will be useful to explain and state this point a little more particularly.

Let it be observed,

1. There are cases, in which one may speak that which is not true, and yet not be chargeable with lying; for he may have no intention to deceive. He



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may have wrong apprehensions—may have been misinformed—may have misunderstood his information—may have forgotten some circumstance of the case; and hence may utter that which is not perfectly true, and yet speak with an upright heart and an honest meaning. Let it be considered, however, that in all matters of importance, of which we may have occasion to speak, a regard to truth will induce us to seek right information, and to retain the information given us. If we take up reports hastily, and communicate them confidently; if we receive doubtful matters without inquiry, and relate them with airs of assurance, we discover, at least, the want of a just reverence for truth, though perhaps our fault will not deserve the harsh appellation of lying.

We are not, in all cases, bound to speak the *whole* truth. "A fool uttereth all his mind; but a wise man keepeth it in till afterward."—"There is a time to speak, and a time to keep silence."—"And a wise man's heart discerneth both time and judgment." We are never to violate truth; but we may suppress it, in whole or in part, as we think proper, when the man who demands it, has no right to know it. So we may withhold our property from the man who makes an unjust requisition, though we have no right to injure *his*. If the character or dignity of the person proposing the question, forbids our making a peremptory denial; or if the case is so circumstanced, that the refusal of an answer would be a discovery of the secret, we may innocently withhold the most material part of the business, and express only so much as to amuse and divert the inquirer. When Samuel was commanded of God to go to Bethlehem, and anoint one of the sons of Jesse, to be king over Israel instead of Saul; the prophet inquired, "How can I go? If Saul hear it, he will kill me." God answered him, "take an heifer with thee, and say I am come to offer sacrifice." Samuel, though he speaks only the truth, yet conceals the main

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object of his journey, which Saul had no right to know; for by his wickedness he had forfeited his throne. The prophet Jeremiah had been thrown into a dungeon by the order of king Zedekiah, and by the malicious influence of the princes of Judah. He is afterward admitted to a private conference with the king, in which he instructs the king what ought to be done in the present critical state of the nation. The king well knew that if the princes should discover the subject of his conversation with the prophet, his own person would be in danger. At parting, therefore, he charges Jeremiah to conceal it from them; and, if examined, to say, "I presented my supplication before the king, that he would not cause me to return to the house of Jonathan to die there."—"And when the princes came, he told them according to these words, and the matter was not perceived." This, doubtless, was a part of the conversation; the rest it was dangerous to reveal, and the princes had no right to demand it; the prophet, therefore, did well to withhold it.

Farther: There are certain figures, common to all languages, which express things differently from the literal truth, but yet are innocent, because, being well understood, they convey no wrong ideas. We often use a certain number for an uncertain. Jacob says of Laban, "He hath changed my wages ten times. By an *hyperbole*, we sometimes *exceed* the literal truth. David says, "I make my bed to swim with tears." There is also an *ironical* way of speaking, in which the contrary is intended to that which is literally expressed. Elijah says to the prophets of Baal, "Cry aloud, for he is a god"—i. e. ye call him a god, though we know him to be vanity and a lie. The prophet Micaiah says to king Ahab, "Go up against Ramoth Gilead and prosper, for the Lord will deliver it into thine hands;" though he well knew that the king would there be defeated and slain. But here was no deception. The king understood him perfectly. His plain,

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obvious meaning was this, "You depend on the lying predictions of your false prophets, who promise you success in this favorite expedition: It is vain for me to contradict them; for you will not believe me. Go, and try the issue: See whether God will prosper you or not.

But though such figures are innocent, when they are introduced with propriety, yet care should be taken, that they are never used in such a time or manner, as to be the occasions of deception. In stating this matter, let it be again observed,

A man may, in some cases, be guilty of lying, though he speaks no more than what is strictly and literally true. If, for instance, he expresses the truth with an air of irony, so that the hearers will naturally suppose he means the contrary; or if he divulges a truth, which he was previously bound to conceal; or if he affirms that, which he really thinks to be false, though it should ultimately be verified in fact; in such cases he is manifestly chargeable with a criminal prevarication. Having stated the nature of lying, we proceed,

2. To mention some particular cases, in which men are guilty of it.

Now the grossest kind of lying is *perjury*, or speaking a known falsehood under the awful solemnity of an oath. This is a degree of wickedness, to which few will venture, until they have been accustomed to the lower kinds of profanity and falsehood. The crime is greater in proportion to the magnitude and importance of the case in which it is admitted. Perjury in itself is a horrible crime, as it is a contempt of God's power and justice, and a trampling on the sacredness of truth; but when it is so used as to endanger the property liberty, reputation, or life of a fellow citizen, its criminality is horribly augmented. It is then a shocking complication of falsehood, impiety, unrighteousness and cruelty.

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Men violate truth, when they affix to words an arbitrary meaning, or make, in their own minds, certain secret reservations, with a design to disguise facts, and deceive the hearers. It is custom only that gives words and signs their currency. They have just so much value, as the authority of common usage has stamped upon them. And he who attempts to deceive another by departing from the usual signification of words, is just as guilty, as if he had used any other words with the same deceitful intention.

When we express doubtful matters in terms, and with an air of assurance, we may materially injure as well as grossly deceive our neighbor. We never ought to report for certain the things which we have received only from vulgar fame—from a stranger—from men of doubtful veracity—from those, who, though otherwise of good character, yet, in that case, are known to be under a violent prejudice. Of matters thus circumstanced we should speak doubtfully, or state our authority, or, which is usually better than either, say nothing at all.

Men are guilty of wanton and malicious falsehood, when they repeat, with romantic additions, and fictitious embellishments, the stories which they have heard of a neighbor, that thus they may excite against him the severer ridicule, or cast on his character a darker stain, or turn to merriment his godly actions, or his innocent peculiarities. If no more than the gratification of a vein of humor is intended, the fiction is far less criminal. But even here there is guilt and danger; there is a departure from that simplicity, which ought to guide our conversation; and mischief may ensue, of which we are not aware; an innocent neighbor may be materially injured; and a habit acquired in smaller matters may lead to grosser violations of truth.

Men may utter a falsehood by the tone of their voice, while their words are literally true. Language is imperfect; we have not a distinct word for every

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though; we express much by our emphasis and air. You think, perhaps, that you keep near enough to truth, if you repeat the words, which you heard from another; but you may as effectually belie him by a different *manner* of speaking, as by different sentences. There are those who *make*, as well as speak a lie.

Having mentioned some of the ways, in which men violate truth, we will,

3. Consider several distinct cases, in which we are bound to speak truth with our neighbor.

We must preserve truth in our common and familiar conversation. This is chiefly intended in the text.

Precepts similar to this often occur in the sacred writings. "Lie not one to another, seeing ye have put off the old man with his deeds."—"Whatsoever things are true, think on these things."—"He who shall enter into God's holy hill, is one who speaketh the truth in his heart." When friends and neighbors sit in the social circle, the conversation will often turn upon matters which seem to be of little consequence; But whatever may be the subject, their speech should be with grace, seasoned with salt; their conversation should be with simplicity and sincerity: However indifferent the subject may be, a habit of trifling with truth cannot be indifferent. Things which appear small in themselves, may be great in their effects. Trivial misrepresentations, jocular falsehoods and fictitious news, may painfully disquiet honest minds, and incurably break the peace of neighborhoods.

We must speak truth in our commerce with one another. The Apostle says, "Let no man go beyond, or defraud his brother in any matter." The prophet mentions this as an evidence of the prodigious corruption of the Jewish nation, that "they bent their tongues, like their bows, for lies"—that "every brother would utterly supplant, and they would deceive every one his neighbor"—"that they had taught their tongues to speak lies, and wearied themselves to com-

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mit iniquity; and when one spake peaceably to his neighbor, he, in his heart, laid wait for him." So much deception was practised among them, that the prophet says, "Take heed every man of his neighbor, and trust ye not in any brother." Falsehood in dealing soon destroys mutual confidence; and when confidence is lost, society must disband.

In giving public testimony, we must be careful, as on the one hand, to say nothing but the truth, so, on the other, to conceal no part of the truth, which relates to the matter under examination. A *partial* and a *false* representation of facts may equally operate to the perversion of justice. And if, through our prevarication, wrong judgment proceeds, we are answerable for the consequences.

We must adhere to truth, when we speak of men's actions or characters. "Speak evil of no man," says the Apostle. This precept, however, must be understood with some limitation. We may have occasion to speak the evil, which we know of another, either in our own vindication, or for the security of our friends. But when no good end is to be obtained, the evil which we know, ought not to be disclosed. Private expostulation and admonition are all that duty demands. If occasion calls us to speak, we must say no more than truth will justify, and the occasion requires. We are not to speak evil of another, on doubtful evidence, or uncertain hearsay. It is one part of the description of a good man, that "he backbiteth not with his tongue, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbor." We should consider, that the ill report may come from his enemy, or from a prejudiced person—that there may be some mistake in the story, or some circumstance added or omitted, which gives the whole affair a false complexion. If we give a new spring to the rumor, we know not how far it will run, nor what a form it may assume, in passing from one to another. When once it is gone from us, it immediately flies out of our

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reach! It is not in our power to recal it back, to check its progress, or to correct its falsehoods.

It is a precept in the law of Moses, "Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people." Much mischief is done in neighborhoods by those officious tattlers, who carry from house to house intelligence of what one person has said of another. Inadvertant things are sometimes spoken, which had no ill design, and are not worthy of a repetition. If they are repeated, they usually assume an aspect, and acquire a magnitude, of which the person who first spoke them had no idea. Had they remained, as they fell from his lips, no harm would have been done, as none was intended. But now, changed by the talebearer, they have perhaps given an offence, which cannot be removed. The whisperer who revealeth secrets, and the talebearer who circulates domestic intelligence, often separates the nearest friends.

Once more: We must observe truth in our promises.

Truth obliges us, first, to promise nothing different from our intention, or exceeding our ability; and, then, to perform our promise according to the mutual intention and understanding of the parties. Providential adversity may, for the present, suspend, but does not absolutely cancel the obligation to perform our promise. With returning ability, the obligation revives. No promise can bind us to an action in itself unlawful. If we have brought ourselves into such an embarrassment, we are to extricate ourselves by repenting of our criminal rashness. But personal inconvenience, or the prospect of advantage will not exempt us from our obligations. It is the character of the upright man, that, if he swears to his own hurt, he changes not."

II. What we proposed in the second place, was to shew, that a regard to truth is a necessary part of the Christian character.

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The Apostle says, "Ye have been taught, that ye put on the new man—wherefore, putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor." So he says to the Colossians, "Lie not one to another, seeing ye have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man." The Psalmist says, "He who shall stand in God's holy hill, is one who speaketh the truth in his heart." We are taught, that "the fruit of the Spirit is righteousness and truth." On the contrary, falsehood and lying are said to be "of the devil, who was a liar from the beginning, and abode not in the truth." And liars have a part justly assigned them in the place prepared for that lying Spirit. All wilful and deliberate lying must proceed from a corrupt and wicked temper—from pride, malice, envy, covetousness, or some reigning lust, which is opposite to the spirit of the gospel. The Apostle, therefore, with lying, joins anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy and filthy communication, as kindred and associate vices. This horrible group the new man has renounced.

Deceitfulness is contrary, not only to the express commands of the gospel, but even to the dictates of natural conscience; and every man, who walks in guile, dissimulation and cunning, is so far from the spirit of the gospel, that he is sunk below that sense of honor and moral fitness, which is common to mankind. Every man abhors a liar; and no injury is more universally resented among men, than the imputation of a lie. The Apostle speaks of the Heathens, as being full of envy, malignity and deceit; but he says, "They knew the judgment of God, that they who did such things were worthy of death." I proceed,

III. To consider the argument, which the Apostle here urges for the maintenance of truth between man and man. "We are members one of another." We are fellow members, both as men, and as Christians.

As men, we are members one of another. We partake of the same nature, have the same rights and



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claims, are mutually dependent, and capable of being mutually beneficial. We are united in the same civil society—in families, vicinities, and larger communities, and are under the same natural and civil obligations. Mutual confidence is the band, that holds all society together; but there can be no mutual confidence without reciprocal fidelity. Falsehood is a perversion of that faculty, which is the great instrument of society, the faculty of speech; and it dissolves that confidence, which is the grand cement of social union. It renders property, reputation and life insecure. It subverts order, interrupts peace, separates friends, obstructs the course of justice, and, as far as it prevails, it spreads confusion and misery. Men, therefore, no longer treat one another, as fellow members of society, and fellow creatures sharing in the same rights, than they walk uprightly, work righteousness, and speak the truth in their hearts.

The argument applies, with superior force, to Christians.

As Christians, we are children of the same God, the God of truth; we are disciples of the same Lord, the faithful and true witness, who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth. We are partakers of that Spirit, who is called the Spirit of truth, and whose gracious work is in all goodness, righteousness and truth. We are members of the same spiritual head, even Christ. We are united to the same spiritual body, the church. We are called to the same heavenly hope, profess the same faith and worship the same great Parent in the name of the same Mediator. We acknowledge the same gospel, which uniformly requires sincerity and truth, forbids all unrighteousness and deceit, and denounces the wrath of God against every one that loveth and maketh a lie.

If then we walk in guile and deceit—if we practice the vile arts of dishonesty, we palpably contradict our human, and especially our Christian character.—We

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act in opposition to the nature of God, the dictates of reason, the example of Christ, the influence of the Spirit, the precepts of the gospel, the peace of civil and religious society, our mutual relation, and the hopes of heaven.

Our subject leads us to reflect on the excellency of the Christian religion, which, while it points out the way to future glory, provides for the present peace and security of human society. If we would always speak with that candor and simplicity, and act with that fairness and probity, which the gospel recommends, there would be no angry contentions and bitter animosities; families would subsist in harmony; neighborhoods would enjoy tranquillity; communities would be free from disturbances; suits at law would rarely be known; and controversies, when they happened, would be peaceably adjusted and equitably terminated. It is the want of this undissembled goodness and undisguised friendship, which occasions most of the disquietudes attending the social life.

We see the danger of profane language, as it naturally leads to the grossest kind of falsehood, even to perjury in public testimony. The man who always speaks with a sacred regard to truth, establishes a character for veracity, which stamps a credit on his word, and, in ordinary cases, supercedes the necessity of an oath. If lying had never been known, oaths, for the decision of controversies, would never have been introduced. The man who accustoms himself to swearing in common discourse, acknowledges the insufficiency of his simple declaration, and holds up to the world a character of doubtful veracity. But if his veracity is doubtful, his oath will not command belief; for the man, who is accustomed to profaneness, may as easily learn to perjure himself, as the man habituated to little falsehoods can learn to prevaricate in important matters.

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We see how dangerous it is to practice those diversions, which are attended with temptations to fraud. In this view, gaming for money must universally be condemned. Where any thing is depending on the issue, there is a strong inducement to artifice and deception. Men excuse fraud in this case, because it is only *gaming*, not business. But a habit of deceit acquired in gaming, is easily carried into more important transactions.

We should educate our children in a regard to truth, and exercise over them a government which may speak its sacred importance.

In a word this should be our resolution and care, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we will have our conversation in the world.

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# SERMON XXVIII.

## *Meekness in opposition to Sinful Anger.*

EPHESIANS iv. 26, 27.

*Be ye angry and sin not; let not the sun go down on your wrath; neither give place to the devil.*

THE Apostle, having taught the necessity of being renewed in the Spirit of the mind, proceeds to inculcate the several virtues which form the character of the new man. The first which he mentions is *sincerity*, or a strict regard to truth in our common conversation. The next is that contained in the words now read, which is *meekness*, or the government of our passions. "Ye have been taught——that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor. *Be angry, and sin not.*" This precept is very properly subjoined to the former. Falsehood in speech often proceeds from excess of passion. If we would govern our tongues, we must rule our spirits. He who puts away lying, and speaks only truth with his neighbor, does not indulge immoderate anger, for this inflames the tongue, and thus sets on fire the course of nature; nor does he give place to the devil, for he was a liar from the beginning, and abode not in the truth.

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We will, first, state the meaning of this precept, "Be angry, and sin not," and shew, in what cases we may innocently be angry—next, mention some instances of sinful anger—finally, consider in connexion with this precept, the caution, "not to give place to the devil."

I. We will state the meaning of this precept, "Be angry, and sin not;" and shew how far anger may be innocent.

These words are not an injunction to be angry; but a caution not to sin, when we are angry. Anger is one of the natural passions. There are occasions on which it will involuntarily arise. There seems to be no more necessity for commanding us, in general, to be, or not to be angry, than there is for enjoining, or forbidding hunger, thirst, desire, or fear. But as there is special danger of sin, when anger is awakened, so there was great propriety in the caution, "Sin not in your anger." This evidently is the Apostle's meaning.

That we may form a more accurate judgment, how far anger is innocent, and when it becomes sinful, it will be necessary to consider, what anger is in itself, separate from the excesses and irregularities, which usually attend it.

Anger is a displeasure and uneasiness of mind, arising from the apprehension of injury or wrong, and accompanied with a desire to prevent or remove it.

Mere evil or pain is not the proper object of anger; but it is evil *designed*, or *supposed* to be designed; or what we call *injury*. To be angry at providential calamities is *impiety*. To be angry at the inanimate instruments of mischief, or at the natural actions of brutes is *peevishness*. But the injuries done to us, or intended against us by rational creatures, justly cause displeasure, or resentment. Whether the injury immediately fall on us or on others, it may be an object of displeasure; but, in the former case, the resentment will be more sensible and active, because the principle of

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selfpreservation operates more suddenly and powerfully, than the principle of compassion for others.

This displeasure at injury implies a desire to remove, or prevent it. We cannot be willing to suffer an evil which we think to be maliciously intended, or unjustly inflicted. A principle of piety may compose and calm our spirits under injuries, and restrain us from violent methods of redress; but the injuries themselves will be painful while they are felt, and tolerable only until they can be innocently removed.

When violence approaches our persons, or our properties, the first rising of resentment is certainly innocent. It is only the call of nature to put ourselves in a posture of defence, and to ward off the impending evil.

As we naturally love life, so we have an innate desire of esteem. Any contempt or reproach offered to our characters, unavoidably excites displeasure, and prompts us to selfvindication. And we have the same right to guard our reputations as our persons. Our feelings, in both cases, urge us to defend ourselves; but reason and piety must prescribe the means, and prudence guide us in the use of them.

We feel not only for ourselves, but for others. Compassion is a natural sentiment, as well as selflove. The sight of a danger threatening our fellow creatures, rouses us to interpose for their protection. We sympathize with others in their grief, even though we know not its cause. But we never sympathize with them in the violent paroxysms of their anger. We rather feel for those who are the objects of this passion, and exert ourselves to defend them against it.

Farther: As there is, in our nature, a principle of resentment against injury; so there is, in a virtuous temper, a holy displeasure against moral evil; and this is sometimes in scripture called anger. It is said, in commendation of the Ephesians, that "they could not bear them who were evil." When Moses, descending from the mount, beheld the Israelites worshipping a

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golden calf, his anger was exceeding hot, and, in the heat of his indignation, he cast down and brake the tables of stone which were in his hands. It is to be remarked, however, that he did not break the tables, before he came within view of the idolaters; so that by this action he strongly testified his holy resentment of their horrid impiety. When David heard Nathan's story concerning the rich man, who, sparing his own flocks, had taken a poor neighbor's only lamb to make an entertainment for his friend, "his anger was greatly kindled against the man who had done this." The virtuous principle rose in honest indignation against such an inhuman action. When our divine Lord perceived the prodigious obstinacy of the Pharisees, "he looked about upon them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts." This example shews, that *reproof*, in cases of great and obstinate wickedness, ought to be administered in such a manner, as will express both a compassionate concern for the offenders, and a virtuous indignation against their vices. Eli's reproof to his ungodly sons was much too soft and gentle, when he said, "Why do ye such things? I hear of your evil dealings by all this people. It is no good report that I hear of you. Ye make the Lord's people to transgress."—He was not only a father, but a priest and a magistrate; and he ought, in this case, to have acted with greater authority. God therefore says, "I will judge the house of Eli forever, for the iniquity which he knoweth, because his sons made themselves vile, and he restrained them not."

We have shewn how far anger is innocent.

II. We proceed to shew, in some instances when it becomes sinful.

1. Anger is sinful, when it rises *without cause*. "Whosoever," says our Lord, "shall be angry with his brother without a cause, shall be in danger of the judgment."

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Considering the imperfection of human nature, and the various interests, habits and educations of mankind, you may expect often to meet with things not perfectly agreeable to your wishes and feelings. If you will suffer yourself to be vexed and disturbed with every trivial affront, every disrespectful word, every opposition to your opinion, every neglect of the little punctilios of ceremony, you may be in continual vexation of Spirit. It is a weak and vain mind, that can dispense with no little errors in other people's sentiments, and bear with no faults in their behavior. Before you expect perfection in your neighbors, attain to perfection yourself. Before you demand that all men shall please you, study to please all men in all things. The more careful you are to gratify the humors of others, the more easily you will overlook or pardon their failings.

2. *Rash* anger is sinful. "Be not hasty in thy Spirit to be angry."—"Be slow to wrath."

You suppose your neighbor has done you an injury;—but possibly you mistake the case—examine it coolly—go and converse with the man—hear what he has to say—admit every reasonable excuse. If you are angry before you know there is cause, you are angry without cause. "Charity suffers long and is kind; it is not easily provoked; it believeth all things, and hopeth all things."

3. Anger is sinful, when it *exceeds the demerit* of its cause; for so far as it overrates the offence, it is without cause.

Anger is a selfish, blind, heady passion: It is extremely apt to aggravate injuries by adding fictitious circumstances. If you meet with a provocation, stand upon your guard: You are in greater danger from your passion within, than from the supposed enemy without. Hearken not to its inflammatory suggestions: Listen rather to the soft and kind voice of Charity; she will tell you to mitigate the offence; she will



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caution you not fully to depend on the judgment which anger has formed; but to make some deductions from it; she will advise you to judge equitably, and not according to the first appearance.

4. Anger is sinful, when it breaks out into indecent, reviling and reproachful *language*.

Moses, though exceedingly meek in his general temper, once fell into such a sudden heat of passion, that he spake unadvisedly with his lips. For this transgression, he was denied the privilege of entering into Canaan. Our Saviour has warned us, that if we express our anger in terms of reproach and contempt against our brethren, we expose ourselves to an aggravated punishment. It is the advice of an apostle of Christ, "Be pitiful, be courteous, not rendering railing for railing, but contrariwise, blessing; knowing, that hereunto ye are called, that ye should inherit a blessing." This advice comes to us recommended and enforced by the example of Christ himself, "who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered threatened not, but commited himself to him who judgeth righteously." The observation of Solomon is often verified in experience, "A soft answer turneth away wrath, but grievous words stir up anger."

5. Anger is sinful, when it prompts to *designs*, or *acts* of *revenge*.

The divine law authorized a judge, when an injured person applied to him for redress, to give an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth. The Jewish doctors hence absurdly inferred, that the party injured, not only was bound to demand retaliation, but might execute with his own hand such a measure of revenge as the law prescribed. This perversion of the law our Lord condemns; and, on the contrary, teaches his disciples, that they are, in no case, to revenge an injury; and that, in many cases, especially where the injury is but small, or such as may be borne without great inconvenience, it is better to pass it by unnoticed, or overcome

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it by goodness, than to provoke fresh injuries, and perpetuate a contention, by seeking redress in law. "Ye have heard," says he, "that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil; but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also; and if a man will sue thee at the law and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also; and whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain." To the same purpose is the instruction given by St. Paul to the Romans. "Bless them who persecute you—bless and curse not—recompense to no man evil for evil—provide things honest in the sight of all men—avenge not yourselves, but rather give place to *his* wrath, who hath said, Vengeance is mine; I will repay—therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing, thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

Anger is criminal, when it settles into *malice*.

Though you should not in word or action, attempt any thing like revenge; yet if you are continually brooding over a supposed injury; studying to aggravate it; calling up in your mind a thousand unfavorable sentiments concerning him who has done it; listening with pleasure to every evil thing which you hear of him; and contemplating with delight every misfortune that befals him; you are guilty in the eyes of that Being who looketh on the heart, and who hath said, "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart—thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people; but thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." It is this *indulgence* of anger, which the Apostle seems chiefly to intend, when he cautions against sinful passion; for he immediately adds, "Let not the sun go down upon thy wrath." A wise man may be *surprised* by anger; but it *rests* only in the bosom of fools.

We proceed to observe,

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III. To this caution against sinful anger the Apostle subjoins another, which is nearly connected with it; "Neither give place to the devil."

By placing these two cautions together, the Apostle intimates, that sinful passion often arises from the influence of the devil; and that, when passion prevails, we, in a peculiar manner, give place to this malignant spirit, and yield ourselves to his power.

"Every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lusts and enticed." And it is by means of these lusts, that the adversary finds free access to the human mind. Against the great Redeemer he gained no advantage, because he found in him no unruly passion, or irregular inclination. "He that is born of God, keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not." But "he works in the children of disobedience;" for "they walk according to the course of this world, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind."

If then you would not give place to the devil, see that you subdue your lusts and rule your spirits. These are the traitors within, who hold a correspondence with the enemy, and secretly open to him the gates of the fortress. By slaying these, you will frustrate his designs against you. They who repent and acknowledge the truth, are said to "recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, by whom they were taken captive at his will." As these Ephesians had been "taught to put off, concerning their former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt, according to deceitful lusts," it might be expected, that "they would resist the devil," and no more permit him to work in them, as he had done, "while they all had their conversation in the lusts of the flesh."

Your first care then must be to "abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;" to restrain the excesses, and correct the irregularities of passion, and shun those evil communications, which corrupt good manners.

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Be watchful against the temptations which most easily beset you, and keep yourselves from your own iniquity. Get acquainted with yourselves, learn the bias of your constitution, observe your predominant passions, and guard the weak side, where the enemy will be most likely to make an assault, and will most easily effect an entrance.

Withstand the beginning of temptations. When evil thoughts and dangerous passions move within you, immediately dispossess them. Let them not lodge there; "for when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."

In all your important concerns; especially in matters which relate to religion, act with calmness and deliberation. "A prudent man will look well to his goings; but the foolish pass on and are punished." If you hastily obey every suggestion, and blindly follow every impulse, you have no security; you are taken captive by Satan at his will. When a thought is suggested, or an inclination excited, examine it before you comply with it—inquire, whether it be agreeable to reason and the word of God; whether it be of a holy tendency; what effect the indulgence of it will have on your temper; what will be the consequences of it to others; and admit, or reject it, according to the result of those inquiries.

That you may not give place to the devil, arm yourselves with the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. Thus did the captain of our salvation. Satan tempted him to false worship; Jesus replied, "It is written thou shalt worship the Lord thy God." Satan perverted the scripture to encourage a rash confidence in God's promise. The Saviour answered, "it is written, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord." Store your minds with scriptural knowledge, that you may always have an argument ready against every evil suggestion. Attend to the plain, obvious, literal sense of scripture,

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and govern yourselves by it, that you may not be misled by the slight and craft of them who lie in wait to deceive.

The divine word will furnish you with an answer to every temptation, and an argument against every sin. If you perceive an evil thought or passion stirring within you, confront it by some pertinent passage of sacred writ. If doubts should arise concerning any doctrine of religion, go to the word of God and inquire, whether it is clearly and expressly taught there: If it is; then submit to its genuine influence; and study no evasions to pacify a guilty conscience. If you are tempted to an action, which the word of God evidently condemns; contrive no excuses and palliations; but say with the patriarch, "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" If, under a supposed injury, passion urges you to some violent measures for redress, remember the words of the Apostle, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place to wrath;" i. e. give place to the wrath and justice of God, for vengeance belongs to him. If religion is represented in a discouraging light; inquire whether this is the light in which the Saviour exhibits it. Think of his kind invitation and promise, "Come unto me, all ye that labor, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest to your souls; for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." If you excuse yourselves from prayer, or any other duty, under a notion that you are not fit for it, and shall consequently incur greater guilt in the observance, than in the neglect of it, look into the Bible, and see whether these are not expressly enjoined on *all*, without distinction, and whether your excuse is once admitted there. If you are tempted to delay the work of religion; hear what the scripture says; "Boast not of tomorrow"—"Behold now is the accepted time." Are you inclined to entertain

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loose thoughts of the nature of religion? Attend to the Saviour's words: "Strive to enter in at the straight gate, for many will seek to enter in, and shall not be able."

Thus you are to repel the temptations which approach you.

Again: That you may not give place to the devil, take time to consider, whether any motive suggested in favor of sin is, in its nature, so powerful, as the arguments which the scripture offers against it. Apply to yourselves the Apostle's expostulation with the Romans: "What fruit had ye then in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death." Employ yourselves in pious meditations, in prayer, and in converse with the word of God. When Satan finds a soul empty and swept of every serious thought and disposition, he enters in and dwells there. They, in whom he dwells, are such as give him place. They who resist him, find him a conquerable enemy.

We sometimes complain of temptations; but our greatest danger is from ourselves. They will not essentially injure us, unless, by the indulgence of some criminal passion, we give them place. The best men may be molested by the adversary; but steady vigilence and firm resistance will give them the victory. The God of peace will bruise Satan under their feet.

To conclude: Let us consider the danger to which we are exposed from the busy malice of evil spirits; and remember that our danger is then the greatest, when our passions rise the highest. Let us be sober and vigilant, because our adversary the devil goeth about, seeking whom he may devour: Him let us resist, stedfast in the faith; thus the God of all grace, who hath called us to his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, will make us perfect, establish, strengthen and settle us. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

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# SERMON XXIX.

## *Justice, Industry and Charity.*

EPHESIANS iv. 28.

*Let him that stole, steal no more; but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that he needeth.*

THESE words may be considered as an explanation of the eighth command in the decalogue, which says, "Thou shalt not steal." This command, by natural construction, forbids all injuries to our neighbor's property; and consequently requires us to procure the necessaries of life by our own industry." "Let him that stole, steal no more; but rather let him labor."

We will illustrate the text in several observations.

I. Here is a general prohibition of *theft*.

This prohibition supposes distinct rights and separate properties. If it had been the intention of the great Lord of all things, that his servants should use his goods in common, he never would have enacted a law against stealing; for where one man has no property distinct from another, there is no room for the crime, and no occasion for a law against it. If each man has a personal distinction from all others; and if

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his limbs, skill, invention, and labor are his own, and not his neighbors, then the fruits of his study, industry and enterprise belong to himself, and to no one else. And whatever he obtains by means not injurious to others, he has a right to possess, and none has a right to take it from him, either by violence or artifice. By the prohibition of robbery, theft and fraud, God has confirmed to every man his property, and warned others not to invade it.

We are placed in a state of mutual dependence. No man possesses, or can alone procure every thing which he wants; but each must receive something from another. There is among men a great diversity of talents, abilities and conditions. Some have strength and others skill—some have riches, others capacity for labor. The rich need the poor man's labor; the poor need the rich man's superfluity; all need mutual assistance. It was the design of Providence, that we should live in society and subsist by reciprocal aid. And this aid should be voluntary. The rich have no right to exact the poor mans's service without his consent, or to use it without wages; nor have the poor a right to take the rich man's property without his knowledge, or without compensation. In short no man has a right to live at the expense of others, while he can live by his labor, or to support himself by any kind of labor, that is injurious to his neighbors.

*Stealing*, in common acceptation, is, "taking and carrying away another's goods in a secret manner, and without his consent." But this species of wrong is not the only thing forbidden in the divine law, under the name of stealing; for the reason of the law extends to every kind of deception and fraud, by which one can injure the property of another. The Apostle opposes *labor* to theft; and therefore in his idea of theft are included all those unjust methods which men take for a maintenance, rather than apply themselves to labor. If the injury done to our neighbor is that, which



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makes stealing criminal, then it is criminal to transfer to ourselves his property in any other way which is injurious to him. "Ye shall not steal," says Moses, "nor deal falsely, nor lie one to another."—"Thou shalt not defraud thy neighbor, nor rob him, nor shall the wages of him that is hired abide with thee until the morning." The Apostle says, "Let no man go beyond, nor defraud his brother in any matter; for the Lord is the avenger of all such." We must therefore understand the prohibition in the text, as relating to every unfair, indirect, dishonest way, by which one may transfer to himself the property of another; whether it be unfaithfulness to a trust reposed in him; the embezzlement of goods committed to him; contracting debts without ability or intention to pay them; secreting and detaining lost things which he has found; taking advantage of men's ignorance or necessity in dealing with them; making false pretensions of poverty or infirmity to obtain alms; disabling himself by extravagant expense, or by voluntary alienation of property, from satisfying the just demands of creditors; or any other deceitful artifice; for in all such cases, he takes that from his neighbors, which they did not freely and understandingly consent to part with.

II. This prohibition of *theft* is a virtual injunction of *labor*. For if a man may not live at the expense of others, he must live at his own; and if he has not the means of subsistence, he must labor to acquire them. The Apostle says, "Let him that stole, steal no more, but rather let him labor, working with his hands." If every man is not bound to work with his hands, yet every man is bound to do this rather than steal. No plea of necessity can be admitted in justification of dishonesty. The poor are God's charge; but he allows them not to invade the rights of others. And if the poor may not do this, much less may the rich, who have all things and abound. So sacred a

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thing is property, that God declares himself the revenger of all such, as in any matter defraud their brethren.

No man has a right to live on *charity*, as long as he can live by labor. The Apostle does not say Let him *beg*, but let him *labor*. Charity is much recommended in the gospel. They who are rich must be ready to distribute. If there are some who are bound to give, there are others who may receive. And who are these? The Apostle tells us, they are such as *need*: But they who can labor are not the needy; for these are commanded to labor, that they may give to the needy. The objects of our charity, then, are those needy persons, who have not the ordinary comforts of life, nor ability to procure them by their labor. The Apostle says, "If any man will not work, neither let him eat." Let him not be supported by your beneficence, but feel the effects of his own idleness. There are some industrious and prudent people, who by the hand of Providence are reduced to such difficulties, as really to need the help of their neighbors. To these we should shew mercy with cheerfulness. But to vagrant beggars, of whom we know nothing, but from their own information, we are bound to give no more than what their immediate preservation requires.

The obligation to labor is not confined to the poor; it extends to all, according to their various capacities. If man was made only to eat and drink, they who have goods laid up for many years, might take their ease, eat, drink and be merry. But our Apostle teaches us, that we have something to do besides supplying our own wants, and those of our immediate dependents. We are to communicate to such as need. And as long as there are such with us, our wanting nothing is no reason why we should do nothing. There are some whose condition raises them above manual labor; but none whose rank elevates them above the obligation to be useful. If a poor man should be industrious, that he may gain what his own wants require, and some-

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thing to spare to those who are poorer than himself, the rich surely should devise liberal things, and abound in every good work.

The necessary affairs of the world cannot be managed by manual labor only: Some must be employed in matters of government; some in the education of youth; some in dispensing religious instructions. There is an extensive field for various employments, and every man should be diligent in his own. If a man with his present abilities may be useful, with greater abilities he may be more so. Let every one therefore study to enlarge his abilities, that he may extend his usefulness.

III. The Apostle teaches us, that every man must choose for himself an *honest* calling and must work that which is *good*.

We must employ ourselves in some kind of business which is lawful in itself. Every occupation which arises from the condition, and is adapted to the exigences of mankind, is lawful. Besides real necessaries, there are various conveniencies, which we may reasonably desire; and every employment which contributes to the improvement of human happiness, is good and commendable. Such an employment we may choose, and no other. An occupation good in itself my be unsuitable for us, because with our education, means and abilities, we cannot direct it to its proper end. Here we should be out of our place. We are to maintain good works for necessary uses, and that they may be profitable to men. A profession incompatible with our usefulness, if it may be good in other hands, cannot be so in ours. A work in which a man makes gain by the expense, and enriches himself by the loss of others, is theft embellished and refined. As our calling must be lawful in itself, so we must use it in a lawful *manner*, with integrity, justice and fidelity.

From these observations we may fairly collect, that *gaming*, when it is used as an art to get money, is crim-

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inal, for this obvious reason, because it is unprofitable; and what one gains by it another must lose. Both parties cannot be gainers, as they may in the employments which arise from human wants; and a business in which one must necessarily lose as much as the other gets, is for that reason immoral.

This leads us to another observation;

IV. That in all our labors we should have a regard to the good of *others*. The Apostle says, "Let him labor—that he may have to *give to them who need*."—"Work with your own hands, that ye may walk honestly toward them who are without, and that ye may have lack of nothing."

The man who is poor should aim to mend his circumstances, and to provide not only for his immediate support, but also for his future necessities. For this end he is bound as well to frugality and sobriety in his expenses, as to diligence and industry in his calling. They who labor strenuously, and spend profusely, take a part as inconsistent with reason and religion, as they who work not at all. If the Christian must work to serve the ends of charity, he must lay up something for the day of sickness and the time of old age, when he will be unable to work; for the first piece of charity to which every man is bound, is to keep himself from being a burthen on the charity of others.

Next to himself the Christian is to provide for them of his household. If he neglects these, he is worse than an infidel. Nor must he provide for their *present* maintenance only, but also for their *future* support and usefulness. This is best done by training them up to industry in some honest calling, and by forming them to early habits of virtue and piety.

Hence it appears that the Christian, in ordinary cases, is not bound to give to others *all* that he can save out of the fruits of his labor; for then he could not make that provision for future wants, to which justice and charity, as well as prudence, oblige him.

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It appears also that the condition which subjects us to the necessity of labor, does not exempt us from the obligation to beneficence. The rich are indeed under the highest obligations; but the poor are not excused: And every one will be accepted according to *that he has.* The Apostle's direction is, "Let every man lay by him in store as God has prospered him." The command given to the Jews was, that "every third year they should bring forth all the *tenth* of their increase that same year, and lay it up within their gates, that the stranger, the fatherless and the widow might come and eat and be satisfied." The *tenth* of the increase of every *third* year, was the *thirtieth* part of their *yearly* increase. The proportion required of all was the same; the benefaction therefore would be greater or less according to each one's ability. "Withhold not good from them, to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thy hand to do it. Say not to thy neighbor, Go, and come again, and tomorrow I will give, when thou hast it by thee."—"Give to him that asketh; and from him that would borrow of thee, turn not thou away."—"As there is opportunity, do good to all men."

We see, that we may not neglect the needy, in pretence that we are not so able, as our neighbor is, to relieve them. Perhaps he will excuse himself in the same manner. Each one must attend to his own duty, and not wait to see whether another will do his. If we all wait for one another, nothing will be done at all. If we think our poverty exempts us from the common obligation to do good, let us enquire, whether we have used our time and substance with prudence and frugality. If our disability is the fruit of our own vice and folly, it will be but a miserable kind of exemption from the calls of charity.

The obligation to usefulness lies indiscriminately on all, whether in a public or private, in an affluent or moderate condition. If one cannot be so useful as another,

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yet he may be useful; he may fill his smaller, as well as the other his larger circle.

That we may be useful, we must be quiet and peaceable; we must injure no man in his person, defraud no man in his property, and wound no man in his reputation; we must govern our spirits, bridle our tongues, and render to all their dues.

We must confine ourselves within our own proper sphere, for here we can do more good than elsewhere. We must attend to our personal and domestic concerns, the labors of our profession, the order of our families and the education of our children; and never rashly invade the province, or officiously meddle in the affairs of other men. Charity, indeed, will look at the affairs of others; will study to relieve their wants, rectify their mistakes and redress their wrongs: But she will not pry into their secrets, take part in their contentions, obtrude her advice where it is not desired, nor pass her judgment where she has not information; she will not go up and down as a talebearer, disturbing the peace of neighbors and the harmony of families. Least of all will she quit her humble station to arrange the great affairs of communities, and regulate the deep politics of states. She will not exercise herself in great matters and in things too high for her. She will not clamor against public measures to display her own importance and awaken a spirit of discontent in others; but will employ her influence to preserve peace where it subsists, and to restore it where it is interrupted.

We must fill up our time with diligence in our proper business. Our usefulness depends not on our moving in a large circle, but on our filling well the circle assigned us. The moon is useful as an attendant on the earth; but in vain could she undertake the office of the sun, to enlighten and warm the system.

We are to do every duty in its season, and regard each branch of our business according to its importance. While we pursue the work of our secular calls

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ing, we must labor principally to secure our heavenly interest.

In all our works, whether secular or spiritual, charity must direct us. In the exercises of social religion, we we must study the things which may edify others, as well as ourselves. In our worldly calling, we must work with our hands, that we may give to such as need, and may walk honestly toward all men. Every one will say, "The ruler in his station must seek the public happiness, and the minister in his profession must watch for men's salvation; and that their callings must not be used merely as a trade to get a livelihood." This is very true; and it is just as true of men in every other profession. The scripture plainly enjoins public spirit on the magistrate, and love to souls on the minister, as principles which ought to govern them in their respective offices; and it just as plainly enjoins piety to God and benevolence to men on all others, as principles which should govern them in their worldly occupations. When it can be shewn, that the farmer in his field, the artificer in his shop, and the merchant in his store, may labor for the sole purpose of acquiring a fortune, and without any view to the happiness of mankind; then it can be shewn, that a minister may preach in the pulpit, and a magistrate may judge on the bench, merely for the sake of *lucre*, and without any regard to the rights of men in this world, or their happiness in the next.

Religion is a common concern, and equally incumbent on all men. Love is an essential principle of it, and as essential in one man as another. Without a spirit of benevolence, the husbandman, physician, lawyer, merchant or mechanic, can no more be religious, than the minister can. We are not to suppose, that religion must be a spiritual and disinterested thing in some people only, and may be a selfish and worldly thing in all others. It must be the same in all; and the general nature of it is not in the least altered by the

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particular business we pursue in life. One man is as much bound as another to regard the temporal happiness and eternal salvation of his fellow mortals, and to contribute, in his place and according to his ability, to the promotion of them. This command of the gospel respects not merely particular characters, but Christians in general. "Whatever ye do, do all to the glory of God—give no offence—please all men in all things, not seeking your own profit but the profit of many, that they may be saved."



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# SERMON XXX.

## *Pure and Edifying Conversation.*

EPHESIANS iv. 29.

*Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers.*

IN this, and in the preceding and following verses, the Apostle instructs us, how the renewed Christian ought to walk, that he may prove the sincerity of his heart, do honor to the religion of Christ, and serve the interest of his fellow men.

Having assumed the new man, which is created after the image of God, he must put away lying, speak the truth to his neighbor, rule well his passions, and give no place to the devil: He must defraud no man; but by industry in his calling, provide an honest supply for his own wants, and a charitable relief for the needy and helpless: He must govern his tongue with wisdom, and order his speech with gravity, that he may not corrupt the manners, but assist the virtue of those with whom he is conversant.

The general end to which we must direct our speech is, "that it be good to the use of edifying." In pursuance of this design, we must avoid such communication, as would corrupt the minds and manners of

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others; and, on the other hand, we must so speak as to minister grace to the hearers.

We will shew, first, what is this corrupt communication, which we must avoid; and, secondly, in what manner we may minister to the edification of those whom we converse with.

I. We will, first, consider, what the communication is, which the Apostle cautions us against.

Corrupt communication stands here opposed to that which is profitable for edifying, and which ministers grace to the hearers. It must therefore intend such discourse, as would corrupt the principles, and vitiate the manners of those who hear us.

As it was the design of the Creator, that we should live together in society, so he has made us, not only capable of communicating our thoughts, but susceptible of impressions from the thoughts which are communicated to us. The mind is influenced to a virtuous or vicious choice by the thoughts. And as good thoughts suggested to us, aid a virtuous choice, so the suggestion of evil thoughts tends to a vicious choice. Every kind of discourse, which offers arguments in favor of sin, which strengthens the operation of dangerous sentiments—which excites evil desires and inclinations—or weakens the motives to virtue and piety, may be called corrupt communication, because it tends to corrupt good manners.

David says, "I hate vain thoughts, but thy law do I love." He considers the indulgence of vain thoughts as inconsistent with a real love of, and sincere obedience to the law of God. Now if evil thoughts, however suggested, are dangerous, peculiarly so are those suggested in conversation; for these we receive as thoughts which have already existed in the minds of others—in the minds of Christian professors. If we esteem the person who suggested them, there is then a presumption in their favor. They come to us, not simply as thoughts, but as thoughts recommended by

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example. Christians, therefore, should be careful that no corrupt communication proceed out of their mouths; for, coming from them, it tends much more to corrupt the hearers, than if it came from persons of a different character and profession.

1. We may understand the Apostle as cautioning us against all *loose* and *licentious* language.

The precepts, institutions and doctrines of the gospel uniformly dissuade from vice, and urge to purity of heart and manners. If, in our conversation, we throw out sentiments, which contradict this holy design—sentiments which lower the terms of salvation, weaken the obligations to virtue, and make vice appear less infamous or dangerous, than the gospel represents it—if we call in question the important truths of religion, make light of divine institutions, and treat with an air of contempt a strictly virtuous and godly character, our communication is corrupt in its nature, and pernicious in its tendency.

2. *Enticing* language is forbidden.

"They who themselves rejoice to do evil, delight in the frowardness of the wicked." The number of transgressors is some defence against the reproaches of the world, and some security against the upbraidings of conscience. Hence determined sinners are industrious to draw others into a partnership with them. But Christians profess to have put off the old man, and to have put on the new man. It may therefore be expected of them, that they should be grieved when they behold the transgressions of the wicked, and be humbled when they see the falling of their fellow Christians. Surely they will not lie in wait to deceive—they will not strengthen the hands of evil doers—they will not cause a brother to offend, nor rejoice even when an enemy falleth.

3. Corrupt communication includes all kinds of *vain* discourse—all such language as offends Christian sobriety, seriousness and gravity, savors of profaneness

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and impiety, or borders on obscenity and lewdness. The Apostle recommends such speech as ministers *grace* to the hearers—such as is savory and grateful. To this he opposes *corrupt* speech—that which is offensive and disgustful to the sober and virtuous—that which indicates a carnal taste, and tends to vitiate and debauch the hearers. This corrupt communication he more fully explains in the next chapter. "Let not uncleanness be once named among you, who are saints, neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient."

The Apostle speaks, as if he would not suspect that a professor of religion can *addict* himself to this kind of language. He intimates his fears however, that in some unguarded hours; in some seasons of uncommon cheerfulness, one may happen to be *betrayed* into it. He therefore says, "Let *no* corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth." Watch over your heart and tongue, on all occasions and in all companies, that you never admit a sentiment which would pain your own conscience in the reflection, nor once let slip an expression, which would corrupt the minds of others in its consequences. Remember that you are called *saints*. Let your language be such as becomes your character. Let not uncleanness, foolish talking, or bitter jesting, be once uttered by you, in such a manner as contradicts this sacred character, wounds the virtuous feelings of your Christian brethren, or encourages vice among the looser part of mankind.

St. James says, "if any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body." David resolved, "I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle." The most watchful Christians may probably confess, that they sometimes have been off their guard; and in the free hours of social conversation have uttered those things, which on sober reflection they would wish to recal. The recollection of

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these heedless moments should awaken a severer caution. Saints should remember that their reputation, their usefulness, yea, their very religion depends on the good government of their tongue. "For every idle word they must give an account. By their words they will be justified or condemned. If they seem to themselves to be religious, and bridle not their tongue, their religion is vain."

II. We are, secondly, to consider that communication, which is good to the use of edifying, and which ministers grace to the hearers.

The end of speech is, that we may be useful to others, either by mutual conversation, public instruction, or social devotion. To regard this benevolent purpose, Christians are under special obligations, as they have expressly covenanted together to assist one another in the great concerns of religion and immortality.

Solomon observes, that "the lips of the righteous feed many." The good man's aim is not merely to serve himself, but to diffuse knowledge, virtue and happiness, according to the measure of his ability, and the extent of his influence. If he would impart his bread to the hungry, and his raiment to the naked; no less will he instruct the ignorant, warn the thoughtless, and guide the wandering.

There are various ways in which our speech may be useful to edifying.

1. *Instruction* is useful to edifying.

Parents are to edify their children by teaching them the commandments of God, and talking of them, when they sit in the house, and when they walk by the way, and when they lie down, and when they arise. They must early begin this important work, while the minds of their children are tender, and before corrupting sentiments and stupifying habits have gained a preoccupancy. And considering the proneness of youthful age to forget religous instructions, and the dangerous temptations which attend that critical period, they

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must often repeat the same things, giving line upon line, precept upon precept, here a little, and there a little.

*Ministers* are to edify their hearers by explaining, urging and applying the great truths of the gospel. They are to warn every man, and teach every man in all wisdom, that they may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus. They are in meekness to instruct, not only such as love the truth, but those also who oppose it, if peradventure God will give them repentance.

Private Christians should edify one another. They who are strong must bear the infirmities of the weak. They who have knowledge must condescend to men of low estate, inform their understanding and correct their mistakes.

Much disputing about religion contributes little to godly edifying. Disputes are usually intended rather for gaining a victory, than for giving or receiving useful information; and they are oftener conducted with worldly pride and confidence, than with Christian meekness and fear. Hence they terminate in bigotry and alienation, rather than in knowledge and charity. But if Christians, laying apart disputation, would freely and affectionately converse together on the important subjects of religion, they might greatly assist one another in their spiritual concerns and mightily advance the common interests of truth and holiness. Some have more knowledge and greater abilities than others; and even weak Christians, deeply experienced in religion, may often communicate useful and important thoughts to their wiser brethren. We should always "be ready to give an answer to every man, who asks a reason of the hope that is in us, with meekness and fear."

2. *Reproof*, conducted with prudence, is useful to edifying.

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It is a command of the law of Moses, "Thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy brother, and not suffer sin upon him." It is a command of the gospel of Christ, "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him."

Christians are to watch over one another, not with jealousy and hatred, but with candor and love—not that they may espy faults where there are none, or publish those which they find; but that they may give seasonable counsel and reproof, when there is occasion, and thus aid each other's repentance and amendment.

Reproof is a duty too much neglected. A main cause of the neglect, is the disagreeableness of the office, and the fear of offending. One reason why it so often offends, is the imprudent manner and unchristian temper with which it is administered. The man who seldom reproves another but in a passion, will always be suspected of prejudice, when he attempts to reprove and therefore will rarely meet with success. But if Christians would use more openness and freedom in conversation, would be more meek and gentle in their manner of address, and would themselves act more agreeably to the reproofs which they give to others, they would find the work more easy, less offensive, and attended with better effects.

3. *Exhortation* is good for the use of edifying.

Exhort one another daily," says the Apostle, "lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Comfort yourselves together and edify one another. Consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works. We are "to warn the unruly, comfort the feeble minded, support the weak, and be patient to all men."

4. Christians may often edify one another by communicating things, which they have *experienced* in the course of the religious life.

We are not to make the experience of others the standard by which to judge of our state; nor *our* experi-

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ance the standard by which to judge of their state. A communication of experiences with this view, far from being useful to, is inconsistent with godly edifying. This is to put human experience in the place of divine truth. Neither ought we to communicate to others the secret exercises of our minds, for the sake of gaining their esteem and applause. This is the same vanity which made the Pharisees pray in the corners of the streets, and sound a trumpet when they did their alms. Nor ought we to demand from others an account of their secret exercises for the sake of judging their hearts. We are to judge nothing before the time. Secret things belong to God. There are many things in the experience of every good man, which are not proper to be communicated to the world. We are bound to hope favorably of all, who having made a good profession, appear to walk agreeably to it. Concerning the real piety of our brethren we can have no evidence, but what is external. Whatever information they give us of the secret exercises of their hearts, the information is external; it is, at most, but a verbal profession; and we may as well distrust their sincerity in this, as in any other profession which they make.

But then, there are many cases in which it is exceedingly useful for Christians to lay before others their temptations, fears, doubts and infirmities, in order to obtain suitable counsel and advice. They who are consulted may, in such cases, often strengthen and comfort their brethren by informing them what trials and conflicts they have experienced, and in what manner they rose above them. And while they thus encourage their brethren, they may gain fresh supplies of strength in their own souls. This friendly communication awakens mutual intercession, enlivens Christian affections, and warms a godly zeal.

5. Conversing on *religious* subjects in general, is good for the use of edifying.



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This tends to the mutual improvement of Christians in divine and spiritual knowledge. It stirs up their remembrance of things already learned. It confirms their good resolutions. It rouses into action the slumbering principles of piety and virtue. It counteracts the deadening influence of earthly objects. It relieves the soul from the distractions of worldly cares. "As iron sharpeneth iron, so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend. Ointment and perfume rejoice the heart, so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel. The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for want of knowledge."

We see the way in which we are to edify one another. It is by avoiding all corrupt communication, and by using that which is good, and which may minister grace to the hearers. Therefore, as the Apostle directs, "let us walk in wisdom toward all men; and let our speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that we my know how we ought to answer every man."

We are called to be saints. We profess to be the servants of Christ, and members one of another. We have covenanted together for mutual edification and comfort. We often meet in the same temple, take into our lips the name of the glorious Jehovah, and of the holy Saviour. Here we implore the same blessings for each other, as for ourselves. Here we employ our tongues in prayers and praises to the holy and merciful Creator, in the name of a crucified, risen and interceding Mediator. We often recal the pleasing remembrance of this Mediator, by taking into our mouths the symbols of his body and blood. And shall corrupt communication proceed out of mouths, which have thus been employed? Let not blessing and cursing, purity and corruption, issue from the same lips. Let all our conversation be good for the use of edifying, that it may minister grace to the hearers.

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# SERMON XXXI.

## *Against Grieving the Spirit.*

EPHESIANS iv. 30.

*And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of Redemption.*

THIS passage stands among the practical instructions and cautions, which the Apostle addresses to the Ephesian converts, and which occupy a large part of his epistle to them. From an analysis of the context it will derive no special elucidation, and we hope it will need no other than what may be given in the course of our observations upon it.

I. It is here supposed that there is a divine influence necessary to the salvation of fallen men. No doctrine is more plainly taught in the gospel than this.

The conviction of sinners, and their renovation to a holy temper and life, and the progress and perseverance of the saints in their religious course, are in scripture attributed to the Spirit of God, in such terms and phrases, as plainly import the necessity of his influence to effect these important purposes.

The operations of the Spirit, spoken of in scripture, often intend those extraordinary communications, by which the prophets and apostles understood the deep

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things of God, foretold distant events, and performed supernatural works. But besides *these*, it also speaks of an influence and assistance of the Spirit alike necessary for *all* men, and alike common to all *good* men.

If we believe ourselves dependent on God for our natural life, and its daily supplies; for wisdom to contrive and ability to pursue our ordinary business; it would be absurd to deny our dependence on him for the principles and supports of the divine life, for security against temptations, and our safe conduct through this dangerous world, to the kingdom of glory.

We are not to conceive of the common influence of Providence, or of the special influence of grace, in a manner which contradicts our moral agency; for God treats all his creatures agreeably to the natures which he has given them. But if we suppose that the concurrence of Providence in our common labors is consistent with our freedom, as well may we suppose that the concurrence of his grace in our religious duties, is consistent with our freedom. If we believe that the motives and arguments, which we propose to one another, may influence the human mind without controling its liberty of choice, we must believe that God can open the mind to the admission of motives proposed, without controling this liberty.

II. The influence of the Holy Spirit, is expressed in scripture by a great variety of phrases.

Christians are said to be *born* of the Spirit—*renewed*, *sanctified* and *led* by the Spirit—to be *anointed* and *filled* with the Spirit, and to be the *temples* in which the Spirit *dwells*. In our text, and in several other places, they are said to be *sealed* by the Spirit.

*Sealing* in common use, is the impression of the image or likeness of one thing upon another. A seal impressed on wax, leaves there its own resemblance. The Christian sealed by the Spirit receives the divine image on his heart. The word of God is the seal—the Holy Spirit is the sealer—and the heart of man

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the subject. When the Spirit so impresses the truths of the gospel on the human mind, as to transform it into the divine image, then it is said to be *sealed* by the Spirit. The plain literal meaning of the phrase is, that believers, by the influence of the Spirit accompanying the word of truth, are renewed after the image of God, assimilated to the precepts of the gospel, and wrought into that temper of goodness, righteousness and truth, which is the fruit of the Spirit.*

III. Believers are said to be sealed *unto the day of redemption.*

There is a twofold redemption spoken of in the gospel; the redemption of the soul from guilt by the remission of sin; and the redemption of the body from the grave, and its reunion with the soul at the glorious resurrection. The former is mentioned in this epistle, chapter i. 7. "In Christ ye have *redemption*, through his blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of God's grace." The latter in Romans viii. 23. "We who have the first fruits of the Spirit groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the *redemption* of the body." This is the redemption which the apostle intends in our text. Of the same he speaks chap. i. 13. "After ye believed, ye were sealed with the holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance, until the *redemption* of the purchased possession."

The felicity of the heavenly state consists in pure and spiritual tempers and exercises—in nearness to, and communion with God—in the devout contemplation of his character, government and works—in the performance of such services as are assigned to all in their respective spheres—and in the pleasing interchange of benevolent affections and kind offices for the common advancement of knowledge and virtue. For such a state none are prepared, while sin has dominion over them. Fleshly lusts, impure affections and malev-

* See Sermon VII.

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olent passions are utterly inconsistent with admission to so glorious a world. Nothing can enter thither that defiles or works abomination. In the holy place he only can stand, who has clean hands and a pure heart. The sealing or sanctification of the Spirit is therefore a necessary preparation for heaven.

It is also an evidence of our title to heaven—an earnest of our inheritance in the purchased possession. The inheritance is promised to the pure in heart. When we find in ourselves this character, we may appropriate the promise. "Blessed are they that do the commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city." If the Spirit of God dwells in us by his sanctifying influence, we may conclude, that this Spirit, which has quickened to righteousness our souls once dead in sins, will also awaken to immortality these bodies sleeping in the dust.

It is only in this way that the Spirit is an earnest and seal of our future redemption. The evidence of our right to the inheritance is not communicated by immediate discovery, but obtained by diligent inquiry. The testimony of the Spirit, that we are heirs of glory, consists in that work of the Spirit, which qualifies us for glory. We are then to conclude that we have the Spirit, when we are conscious of those tempers which are the fruits of the Spirit. We may then believe, that we are heirs of God's kingdom, when we possess that righteousness, peace and joy of the Holy Ghost, by which his kingdom is distinguished from the world.

IV. The apostle speaks of the Spirit, as being *grieved*, when we act in opposition to his influence. "*Grieve* not the holy Spirit of God."

Joy and grief are attributed to the divine nature, not as expressive of any real emotions of passion like those which are raised in us by success and disappointment; but only as importing in accommodation to human conceptions, the wonderful efforts of divine goodness,

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mercy and love. As we are grieved, when we are disappointed in our endeavors to make others happy, and when our benevolent intentions are treated with contempt and ingratitude; so the Spirit of God is represented as being grieved and disappointed, when his friendly and gracious influences meet with opposition and resistance from us. God's Spirit is called the Spirit of grace, in regard of his readiness to assist us in the duties, and support us in the difficulties of the religious life. The great Parent of our nature is more forward to give his holy Spirit to them who ask him, than we are to answer our children's cries for bread. So much does his goodness surpass the highest instances of parental love, that, in comparison with him, the most affectionate earthly parents are called *evil*. The grace of God's Spirit is expressed by his *striving* with men. He is beforehand with them in his kind offices. He comes to their door and knocks. He continues his addresses, even after he finds opposition. He is reluctant to leave them to the evil imaginations of their hearts. Yea, they who rebel against his gracious motions, are said, not only to grieve him, but, by a bolder metaphor, even to *vex* him. Final opposition is called doing despite to the Spirit of grace. No language can more strongly than this, express God's abundant mercy towards us, and his wonderful grace to assist us in the mighty concern of our salvation.

Great encouragement have we to seek for, and rely upon the grace of the holy Spirit for every purpose of the religious life. We may come boldly to the throne of grace for help in the time of need.

How dangerous must it be to continue in a course of wickedness! This is nothing less than to oppose, grieve and vex the Spirit of God; that kind benevolent Spirit, who strives with us. "Of how sore a punishment shall he be thought worthy, who does despite to the Spirit of grace?"—"Vengeance is mine; I will recompense, saith the Lord. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."

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a solemn caution against grieving the

is most expressly given to those who sealed with the Spirit. But it may be applied to others—to them, who, though not the subjects of his renewing operations, have, however, been favored with his common motions, in a way of awakening and conviction.

I shall point out to you various ways in which men are chargeable with grieving the Spirit.

1. Indifference and carelessness in religion is opposition to the grace of God.

If his Spirit strives with men, he is not indifferent to *their* happiness; and they ought not to be indifferent to their own. If he works in them of his good pleasure, they ought to work out their own salvation with fear and trembling.

While they indulge an habitual negligence of this important work, to which they are urged by the motions of the Spirit within them, they resist and grieve him. He stands at their door and knocks; if they open the door he comes in and rejoices as a welcome guest. If they refuse his applications, he turns away grieved, as a despised and rejected visitant.

2. Spiritual pride grieves the Divine Spirit.

The influence of grace is instructive and humbling. It teaches man his emptiness, weakness and unworthiness; and excites in him earnest desires after pardon and sanctification. To them who improve this grace, more is given. But a soul full of itself, and relying on its own strength and holiness, will be sent empty away.

The man, who, under a consciousness of his guilty state, flatters himself with an imagination, that he may, at any time, when danger approaches, renew his soul to repentance, treats the Spirit of God with contempt. But he who is sensible of his dependence on the God of all grace, both for a heart to repent, and for the blessing of pardon, will seek the Lord while he may be

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found. And to him, who thus humbly seeks, the grace of God is near.

The deceived hypocrite, who, trusting in his own righteousness, thinks that he needs nothing, will reject the gracious counsels of the gospel. But the sincere Christian, feeling his own weakness, esteems it his highest privilege, that he may come to the throne of grace for a supply of the Spirit. And God resisteth the proud; but giveth grace to the humble.

3. The Spirit is grieved, when we neglect the means appointed for obtaining his influence.

God has instituted particular duties to be observed by us with a special view to this important end. The secret and social worship of God, the reading and hearing of his word, and the observance of sabbaths and ordinances, are the means of religion. The essence of godliness consists not in these means, but in that holy temper and life, which they are designed to produce. These duties become subservient to religion, not merely by their natural tendency to advance it in our hearts, but rather as they are the appointed means of obtaining the needful influences of the divine Spirit.

God's gracious communications are not always confined to these means. They are, however, his stated and ordinary methods of intercourse with us. "Draw nigh to God," says the Apostle, "and he will draw nigh to you." God has promised, "In all places where I record my name, I will come unto thee and bless thee." Our Lord promises his spiritual presence in the midst of those, "who gather together in his name." It was when the disciples were together with one accord, in one place, that the Spirit was poured upon them. John "was in the Spirit on the Lord's day;" and on that day he saw Jesus "walking in the midst of the churches."

As the Spirit sanctifies and seals us by the word of truth, so that we may obtain this benefit, we must be



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... word. God begins and carries on ... men's souls, not by immediate ... his gracious concurrence with their ... after truth and duty. Hence the ... these two cautions, "Quench not the ... Despise not prophesying."

... means we must add serious meditation on ... things, and careful examination of our hearts. ... we gain a knowledge of ourselves, a sense of our ..., and an apprehension of the importance of spiritual blessings. While David was musing, the fire burned. In the multitude of his thoughts within him, God's comforts delighted his soul. And all must be accompanied with prayer. "Ask and ye shall receive," says our Lord, "for God giveth his Holy Spirit to them who ask him."

Since these are the ways, in which God has directed us to seek, and encouraged us to expect the needful supplies of his grace; our disregard to them may properly be said to grieve the Spirit. It is a contempt of his offered assistance—an affront to his kindness and love.

Ye, who live in the neglect of secret prayer, and social worship—ye who are strangers to your own hearts, and to the word and sanctuary of God—consider, you not only disobey the express commands of God, but oppose and grieve that Spirit, who, usually, by these means, communicates himself to the soul.

4. Opposition to the strivings of the Spirit is another way in which he is often grieved.

There are times, when sinners are impressed more deeply than usual, with a sense of their guilty and dangerous state, and of the necessity of a speedy repentance. There are seasons also, when true Christians are awakened to more lively affections, and more fervent zeal, than what they ordinarily experience. Whatever may be our character, such favorable motions are to be improved. Our Saviour has taught us, "Who-

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soever hath, to him shall be given; but from him that hath not, shall be taken away even that which he seemeth to have." If we disobey the calls, and neglect the aids of the Spirit, we oppose and grieve him; and what we have may justly be taken away.

We are not, indeed, implicitly to obey every motion started in our minds, concluding it, at once, to be divine. There may be motions suggested by the power of imagination, or by the influence of evil Spirits, which are not to be followed. We should always remember, that the divine influence is not by immediate revelation of something new, and before unknown; but by kind excitation to that which is already revealed or commanded in scripture. How powerfully soever we may be urged to a particular action, or line of conduct, we are not to proceed, until we have examined the matter, and found it agreeable to the word of God. By this rule we are to try all inward motions; and as they agree or disagree with this, we are to embrace or discard them. To suspend our resolution until we can obtain light in a doubtful case; or to refuse compliance with a suggestion palpably unscriptural, is not to grieve, but please the Spirit. This is to follow reason and the word of God. But when conscience strongly remonstrates against manifest evil, or presses to evident duty, then opposition or delay is grieving the Spirit.

5. There are some particular kinds of sin, which are, in an eminent and peculiar sense, opposite to the work of the Spirit.

Among these may be reckoned impurity, intemperance, dissipation, and all the vices of sensuality. This is the language of the gospel; "They who are sensual, have not the Spirit."—"Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit." You cannot be filled with both. "Walk in the Spirit, and ye will not fulfil the lusts of the flesh." When David fell into the gross sin of impurity, God took

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from him the Holy Spirit; and the unhappy offender lost for a time the joy of salvation.

The indulgence of malignant passions, as well as, of fleshly lusts, grieves the Spirit. The fruits of the Spirit are love, peace, gentleness and meekness. The contrary tempers are the works of the flesh, and descend not from above, but are earthly, sensual and devilish. Therefore to the caution in the text the Apostle subjoins a dissuasive from all bitterness, wrath, clamor and evil speaking, and an exhortation to kindness, compassion and mutual forgiveness.

Contentions among Christians are opposite to the Spirit. "Ye are builded together," says the Apostle, "for an habitation of God through the Spirit."—Walk worthy of your vocation in all lowliness, forbearing one another in love, and keeping the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; for there is one body and one Spirit." Christians can no longer be an habitation of the Spirit, than they are builded together. They no longer walk worthy of their vocation, than they preserve unity and peace.

Finally: Men grieve the Spirit, when they ascribe to him those motions and actions, which are contrary to his nature.

If, under pretence of the special guidance of the Spirit, they blindly follow every impulse of a heated imagination, every suggestion of the common deceiver, every motion of their own vanity and pride, they profane and blaspheme his sacred name.

The scripture directs us to prove every Spirit, whether it be of God. If, instead of trying the Spirit which moves us, we rashly obey every motion that we feel, and ascribe to the Spirit of God the tempers and actions which his word forbids, we not only are guilty of great impiety, but lay ourselves open to fatal delusion.

To dissuade us from these, and all other sins, what argument can be more powerful, than this which our

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text proposes? It is grieving the Holy Spirit, whereby we are sealed to the day of redemption; or, at least, are urged to secure a share in the redemption. The offer of redemption is made without distinction. They only are already interested in it, who have been renewed by the Holy Spirit. But even the unrenewed have been the subjects of his convincing and awakening influence. It is not necessary, that we should wait to ascertain our character, before we apply to ourselves the argument. Whatever our character is, we have at least had the offer of redemption, been called to repent, and invited to seek the grace of the Spirit, who is forward to assist us in the religious life. And who of us can say, they have not experienced his strivings within them?

Let us remember, then, that the sins which have been mentioned, as grieving the Spirit, are inconsistent with a clear evidence and scriptural hope of our interest in the great redemption; and the indulgence of them will most certainly cut us off from the glorious inheritance proposed. And if we fail, alas! we shall sink under this additional load of guilt, that we have pursued our own destruction, in opposition to the strivings of divine grace; and, while we have ruined ourselves, we have grieved God's compassion and love.

Let sinners, awed by their danger on the one hand, and animated by their encouragement on the other, flee from the wrath to come, and lay hold on the hope set before them.

Let saints, by a steady faith in God, by a diligent attendance on the means of religion, and by the exercise of a holy temper, keep alive their Christian joy. And let them walk as becomes those who have the earnest of the Spirit in their hearts, and are waiting for the day of redemption.

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# SERMON XXXII.

## *Kindness, Compassion and Forgiveness, in Opposition to Bitterness, Wrath and Evil Speaking.*

EPHESIANS iv. 31, 32.

*Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice; and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.*

IN these, and the preceding verses, the Apostle describes the Christian life. To give us the more accurate and just conception of it, he shews both what it is, and what it is not—what those passions and vices are, which we must renounce; and what those dispositions and virtues are, which we must cultivate.

We are taught, as the truth is in Jesus, to put off the old man, and to put on the new man. The old man is corrupt according to deceitful lusts; the new man is holy after the image of God. The Christian thus renovated must depart from evil and do good—put away falsehood, and speak truth—abhor all dishonesty and fraud, and work with his hands the things which are profitable—allow no vain discourse to proceed from his mouth, but such only as may be useful to edification.

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In the same manner the Apostle, in our text, expresses that benevolent and social temper, which Christians ought to exercise toward one another.

They are to put away anger, malice and evil speaking, and to be kind, compassionate and forgiving, in imitation of the mercy of God, who for Christ's sake hath forgiven them.

We will, first, consider what are the evil dispositions and manners which Christians are here required to renounce. We will then state and explain the opposite virtues. And lastly, we will illustrate and apply the argument by which these virtues are urged.

I. We will consider the evil passions, manners and language, which the Apostle cautions us to avoid in our intercourse with one another. "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice."

1. We are to put away all *bitterness*—all such passions, behavior and language as are disgustful and offensive to others, wound their tender feelings and embitter their spirits. It is an easy and obvious metaphor. We all know how *bitter* objects affect our organs of taste. The bitterness, which the Apostle intends here, is that conduct in the social life, which affects, in a similar manner, the feelings of others. It is a metaphor which the scripture often uses: A bitter affliction is a very painful, grievous, one. To be in bitterness of soul, is to be in great anguish. Bitter words are words which deeply distress the heart. A foolish son is a bitterness to her that bare him, *i. e.* he is a great affliction to her. We read of those whose mouths are full of cursing and bitterness—of severe and reviling language. Husbands are directed to love their wives, and not be bitter against them. Bitterness is here opposed to a smooth, kind and obliging carriage toward intimate friends.

Christians are to put away all such bitterness. Under this metaphor may be comprehended a roughness of

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manners, and severity of temper—a captious, cavilling humor—a spirit of opposition and contradiction, not only in great, but trivial matters—an assuming, imperious behavior toward friends and companions—a disposition to cross their will, and to criminate at a venture every thing they do, whether right or wrong—a proneness to upbraid them with past failings, and reproach them for innocent infirmities—a perpetual jealousy of their intentions, and passionate complaints against them for accidental errors, or even suspected offences. Such treatment is a bitterness to those who have common feelings, especially if they stand in the more tender and delicate relations of life; yea, in those relations, coldness and indifference are more painfully felt, than direct and positive injuries in ordinary cases. The happiness of domestic life depends on mutual affection and confidence. That neglect which betrays the want of regard, embitters the connexion.

But perhaps no temper is more inconsistent with the felicity of social life, than what is commonly called *peevishness*. There are some who are subject to sudden and violent gusts of passion, in which they say and do extravagant things; but when the gust has blown itself out, it is followed with a comfortable calm; and perhaps the clouds which had been lowering before, are now wholly dissipated. So, people, afflicted with epileptic fits, in the intervals of their disorder, enjoy tolerable health: But peevishness can never be easy. It is a restless spirit, irritable at trifles, and discharging its impotent spleen on every object in its way. Though its force may, in general, be but languid, yet it is extremely troublesome and vexatious, because it never can be quiet itself, nor suffer others to be so. Men of violent passion, like a musket, are silent after the explosion. But the peevish are like wild fire, which keeps up a silly noise, and emits an incessant smoke, with little other effect, than

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to disturb the peace, and afflict the eyes of those who are near.

2. The Apostle in the next place, mentions *wrath* and *anger*, as passions which Christians must put away.

These two words in our language, and in the original, are of much the same import. If there is a difference, the former signifies a heat of temper; the latter signifies this heat wrought into a flame. They both together express the passion usually called *anger*, in all its criminal stages and degrees.

Christians should acquire such an habitual command of themselves, as not to suspect evil without evidence, nor be easily provoked at real evil—not to fall into sudden passion at trivial offences; much less, on mere jealousy and surmise—not to be angry without cause, nor before they have examined the cause, and found it substantial—not to indulge resentment beyond the demerit of the provocation, nor express it in exasperating language—not to render evil for evil, nor take rash measures for the redress of their wrongs—not to brood over their passion, till it grows into rancor, obstructs the exercise of benevolence, and diverts the course of good offices which are due to mankind.

Though anger, considered simply as a sense of feeling of the wrongs done us, is innocent and natural, yet all the irregular and excessive operations of it are sinful and dangerous. They expose us to numerous transgressions, bring on us new temptations, provoke fresh injuries, involve us in unnecessary perplexities, rob us of our peace and selfenjoyment and disturb the security of all around us.

3. We are to put away all *malice*.

This is a degree of passion beyond simple anger. It is a fixed, settled hatred, accompanied with a disposition to revenge. It is anger resting in the bosom, and studying to do mischief.



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The Apostle by a natural gradation, rises from the lower to the higher passions. *Bitterness* is a severity and acrimony of temper. *Wrath* is this severity put in motion. *Anger* is this motion accelerated into violence. *Malice* is this violence operating in mischievous effects.

Our Apostle, elsewhere, with malice joins *envy* and *hatred*, to signify its usual operations. "We were sometimes disobedient, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in envy and malice, hateful and hating one another." He speaks of the Heathens, as "filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness, envy, murder, deceit and malignity."

Malice sometimes originates from a supposed injury. In its first stage it is only resentment; but by indulgence it grows into hatred and aversion; and from thence it ripens into malignity and revenge.

Sometimes it takes its rise from covetousness or ambition. The man, whose heart is devoted to the pursuit of wealth or honor, is displeased with all who seem to interfere with him. He is jealous of their designs—envies their success—views them as his enemies—entertains the worst thoughts of them—gives vent to his feelings, first in obscure insinuations, then in bolder reproaches—and by degrees works up his mind into a malignity of temper, which not only rejoices in their misfortune, but plots their ruin.

Malice is a temper which every one condemns in others, but few discern in themselves. It is a self justifying passion. They in whom it operates, are blinded by its influence. They call it by an innocent name. They excuse it on the foot of supposed injuries, or the supposed vileness of the object, and their own superior merit and importance. It is the language of this passion, "I do well to be angry."

To secure our hearts from so criminal a temper, we must guard against it in its lower stages, putting away all bitterness and wrath.

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As one of the common ways, in which malice vents itself to the prejudice of mankind, is reviling and defamatory language, therefore, the Apostle,

4. Exhorts Christians to put away from them *all clamor and evil speaking.*

By *clamor* he intends noisy, complaining and contentious language, in opposition to that which is soft, gentle and courteous.

There are some, who are clamorous from the ferocity and ruggedness of their tempers: And there are others, who by use have acquired such a habit of clamorousness, that whether they are in anger, or only in earnest, their language is much the same. When they give orders or instructions, it is in a manner, which, if it has any affect, operates only on fear, not on the more ingenuous principles. If any thing is done contrary to their intention, they condemn it with such precipitancy and noise, that no excuse can be made, or be heard, if it is made. At the most trivial inadvertencies they exclaim with as much vehemence, as if one were setting fire to their house. Accidental errors are imputed to the worst intention, and the offender is loaded with the vilest epithets.

Such language is what the Apostle calls *clamor*. This is unreasonable in any; but peculiarly indecent in Christians; for they profess a religion, which exhibits for their imitation, the mildest and sweetest examples, and inculcates, in its precepts, moderation and gentleness, soft answers and obliging manners, graceful speech and winning address.

But what the gospel more especially warns Christians to avoid is *evil speaking*.

There are indeed some cases, in which we may speak evil of others. Public and notorious crimes, the corruption of manners, and the degeneracy of the times, may be subjects of discourse among Christians in a way of lamentation, and for mutual warning and excitement. The evil which we know of another, we

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may mention in a way of caution to a stranger, who, for want of information, might be ensnared. If we are called to bear testimony against a criminal before lawful authority, we are bound to speak without reserve, what we know relative to the matter in question.

The frequent cautions in scripture against evil speaking, respect not cases of this nature; much less do they forbid us to speak to the offender himself, in a way of friendly admonition and rebuke. It is the command of our divine Lord, "If thy brother trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault betwixt him and thee. If he hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother."

But we should always remember, that to speak evil of another is a nice and delicate matter. That you may not in this offend, be pleased to observe the following rules:

Never believe, much less propagate an ill report of your neighbor, without good evidence of its truth. Never listen to an infamous story handed to you by a man, who is a known enemy of the person defamed, or who is himself infamous for defaming his neigbors, or who is wont to sow discord among brethren and excite disturbances in society. Never utter the evil which you know or suspect of another, till you have taken an opportunity to expostulate with him. Never speak evil of another while you are under the operation of envy and malevolence, but wait till your spirits are cooled down, that you may better judge, whether to utter or suppress the matter. Never express the evil which you would say of your neighbor, in terms too strong, or in language which would convey an exaggerated idea of his conduct. Never throw out against a man broken hints and dark innuendoes, which would leave the hearers to suspect any thing and every thing that ill nature can suggest. Never speak evil of your neighbor to his known enemy, who wishes for an occasion of slander; for he will certainly paint the image anew, and touch it off with bolder colors. In short; never

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speak evil of a man, when your speaking may probably do much hurt, but cannot possibly do any good.

These are reasonable rules: By a strict adherence to them much evil speaking would be prevented.

II. I proceed to observe, in the second place, the Apostle exhorts Christians to "be kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another."

1. Christians are to be *kind* one to another.

The word signifies such kindness as renders us useful.

Kindness will not always gratify, but sometimes cross the wishes of others. To gratify men's vicious inclinations is not kindness, but inhumanity—not goodness, but injury.

Kindness wishes well to all men, prays for their happiness and studies within its sphere, to promote their interest. It is forward to relieve distress. It will interpose to vindicate an injured character. It will warn the heedless of their danger. It will reprove vice, and lend its aid to promote knowledge and virtue. In a word, it will do good, as opportunities occur, occasions require, and abilities permit.

2. Christians should be *tenderhearted;* or, as the parallel expression is, in the epistle to the Colossians, they should put on *bowels of mercies.* They should not be indifferent to the dangers, and unfeeling to the afflictions of their fellow men, especially of their fellow Christians; but, when an interesting sensibility, weep with them that weep; burn for them who are offended; have compassion on them who are in trouble; remember those who are in bonds, as bound with them, and those who suffer adversity, as being themselves also in the body.

They should not, however, be guided by a blind, instinctive pity; but by an habitual goodness of heart, cultivated with reason, improved by religion and operating with discretion. They should make a distinction of objects; and while they commiserate all who ap-

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pear to be in affliction, they should regard among them the difference of characters and circumstances, giving a precedence to the most necessitous, the most friendless, and the most virtuous; and should exercise their charity in ways consistent with other obligations and the general good. The Apostle adds,

3. That we are to *forgive one another*.

In this imperfect state, offences will come. If therefore we hope to live comfortably in society, we must carry with us a peaceable and forgiving spirit.

Forgiveness does not oblige us tamely to *submit* to every insult, and silently to bear every injury. There are wrongs so gross and oppressive, that justice to ourselves demands redress. And there are some insolent offenders, whom nothing but the terror of human punishment will restrain. When, and how far we may apply to the laws of society for the redress of, or for protection against personal injuries, wisdom is profitable to direct.

But under the influence of that forgiving spirit, which the gospel inculcates, we shall, on our part, be careful to injure no man; and if through inadvertence, passion or temptation, we have done a wrong, we shall, on reflection, be willing to repair it. To those who have injured us we shall maintain good will and exercise forbearance, as far as our own and the common safety will allow. We shall be grieved for their guilt, as well as our own loss; and wish their repentance, rather than their punishment. If there is hope of reclaiming them, we shall treat them with mildness, rather than severity, thinking it better to win them with goodness, than subdue them with power. We shall make some allowance for their mistakes and temptations, and give some weight to excuses in their behalf, not suspecting the worst but hoping all things. Providential disabilities will successfully plead for our forbearance; and propositions of adjustment will be heard with candor. A credible repentance will reinstate them

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in our favor and esteem; and though they continue implacable, they will have a share in our benevolence and prayers.

III. We are, in the last place, to apply the argument, by which the Apostle urges us to this kind and forgiving carriage. "God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Remember, Christians, what ye once were—sinners—enemies to God by wicked works—under his holy displeasure, and exposed to everlasting death. Think how ye were brought out of this deplorable state—not by your own works, but by the forgiving mercy of God. "It is *God* who hath forgiven you." Though your repentance was the condition on which pardon was vouchsafed to you; yet, consider, this pardon was granted, not on the ground of any intrinsic obligatory worth in your repentance, but on the ground of Christ's mediation, who voluntarily suffered for your sins, offering himself a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savor. "God *for Christ's sake* hath forgiven you."

This wonderful instance of divine mercy is pertinently urged on Christians as a motive to mutual forgiveness. God abundantly pardons: Even where sin abounds, his grace much more abounds. He proposes forgiveness to all sinners without distinction, and on the same gracious terms. He forgives great sins as well as small, and repeated transgressions as freely as the first. He renews the tenders of his mercy after multiplied rejections, and waits to be gracious. He forgives without compensation for injuries done him: He requires only that humiliation and penitence of soul, which are necessary preparatives for this gracious pardon. He forgives though he needs nothing from us, and our righteousness cannot be gain to him. He makes the first advances to a reconciliation. He calls us to repentance, and even strives with us, that we may be persuaded to turn and live. He has redeemed us at a great price, even by the blood of his own Son, whom

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he hath set fourth to be a propitiation, that he might be just and the justifier of them who believe.

Let this example of divine mercy persuade us to put away all bitterness, anger, malice and evilspeaking, and to be kind, tenderhearted, forgiving one another.

After our Lord has forgiven us a debt of ten thousand talents, shall we think it much to remit to a fellow servant a debt of a few pence? If we have received the pardon of all our past sins, and hope through grace to obtain the remission of our future ones, shall we be rigorous and implacable to our fellow sinners? Let us remember, that an unmerciful, unforgiving temper is an evidence that we never have really repented of our sins, and that consequently we still lie under the guilt of them all. He who shews no mercy, shall have judgment without mercy. He who forgives not an offending brother, will not be forgiven of his heavenly Father.

"Put on therefore, as the elect of God, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering, forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a complaint against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness; and let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also ye are called in one body."

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# SERMON XXXIII.

## *Imitation of the Love of God.*

EPHESIANS v. 1, 2.

*Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children, and walk in love; as Christ also hath loved us, and given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice unto God for a sweetsmelling savor.*

IN the preceding verses the Apostle inculcates, on his Ephesian converts, several virtues and duties, as being the genuine fruits of the new creature; and then, in our text, he sums them all up in this general direction, "Be ye followers," or imitators, "of God as dear children." The imitation of God comprises all the virtues before enumerated and enjoined, as truth, justice, purity, goodness, and mercy; for these are particular branches of the divine character. Among these the Apostle selects one most eminent and glorious part of God's character, which he distinctly recommends to imitation—"Walk in love." And he subjoins an argument which ought to have peculiar weight with Christians.—"Walk in love, as Christ hath loved us and given himself for us."

The exhortation and the Argument, we will consider distinctly.



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I. We will consider the Exhortation. "Be ye followers of God, and walk in love."

The goodness of God is the glory of his moral character. When Moses prayed, "Lord, shew me thy glory; this was the divine answer, "I will make all my *goodness* pass before thee."

Language affords not stronger terms, or higher expressions, than those in which revelation describes the goodness of God. "He is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works."—"He daily loadeth us with benefits, and we know not the number thereof; if we would count them, they are more than the sand." His goodness is constant; "it endureth forever; it fainteth not, neither is weary." It is exercised toward the most unworthy creatures, in the most disinterested manner, without hope of a recompense. Compared with him, the most bountiful among the sons of men, are evil: Even parental goodness sinks and is lost in the comparison.

Many wonderful instances of God's love to men the scripture adduces, to raise our admiration and gratitude. But the most wonderful of all—that which awakens the loudest songs of angels, and should excite the liveliest praises of men, is the gift of his Son for the redemption of our guilty race. "In this," says St. John, "was manifested the *love* of God toward us, because he sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him."—"Herein is *love*." In this word is comprehended the whole divine character. "We have known the *love* that God hath to us. God is *love*. And he that dwelleth in *love* dwelleth in God, and God in him."

From this divine example the scripture infers our obligation to love our fellow men. "Let us love one another, for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God. He that loveth not, knoweth not God, for God is love. God gave his only begotten Son, that

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we might live through him: If he so loved us, we ought to love one another."

Love is the highest and noblest virtue in the Christian system. To be merciful as God is merciful, is to be perfect as he is perfect. Charity is the bond of perfectness. Christians are therefore required, "above all things to put on charity"—"above all things to have fervent charity among themselves." This is called "the end of the commandment"—"the fulfilling of the law"—"the sum of the law and the prophets." Faith, hope and charity are all great; but the *greatest* of these is charity. In the gospel climax of virtues, you see brotherly kindness and charity standing at the top. These complete the order of graces, and finish the character of the Christian. The grand decision of characters, at the last day, will be made by a particular inquiry into the exercises of this virtue. He who has this, the greatest of all virtues, has the other; and without this all pretensions to religion are vain. For this reason, when the Apostle exhorts us to be followers of God, he particularly reminds us, that we must walk in love. We proceed,

II. To consider the Argument, by which the Apostle presses his exhortation. "Walk in love, as Christ also loved us, and gave himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savor."

The sufferings of Christ for the sin of the world were typified and anticipated in the sacrifices and offerings instituted under the Mosaic law. Hence the language of that dispensation is adopted in the gospel; and the death of Christ is called "a sacrifice and an offering to God."

"Christ was sacrificed *for us*." He suffered death on the cross in our behalf and for our sakes, that we through his blood might obtain everlasting salvation. This is the uniform language of the gospel. "He who knew no sin, was made sin for us, that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."—"He once

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suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God."—"He bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sin, should live unto righteousness."—"He gave himself a ransom for us; and we have redemption through his blood.

"The wages of sin is death." This is the just demerit of, and the legal sentence against the transgression of man. The wisdom of God has seen fit to ordain, that without the shedding of blood there should be no remission of sin. The great ends of God's moral government required, that there should be some solemn display of his just and holy wrath against the disobedience and rebellion of his subjects. To have executed deserved punishment on the offenders themselves would have been for ever inconsistent with their admission to pardon and favor. Therefore, that they might be forgiven in a way agreeable to the great and benevolent design of God's government, he was pleased to appoint and accept an atonement for their guilt. "He set forth his Son to be a propitiation, that he might be just, and the justifier of them that believe."

"Christ *gave himself* for us." He, freely and of his own choice, submitted to all the pains and indignities, which attended a death on the cross; and he bare them all with resignation and patience, that thus he might save us from the wrath to come.

Here was a full display of his love. The Apostle says, "He *loved us* and *gave himself* for us."

He who is the Son of God, the brightness of his glory—He by whom all worlds were made, and who upholdeth all things by the word of his power, He gave —What did he give? Not one of his creatures—not an angel—not a world—but, what is more than all worlds, he gave HIMSELF——for *us*, an inferior order of intelligences—sinners, rebels under sentence of condemnation.

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He gave himself, not merely to become a man, and dwell on earth—not merely to be our pattern, teacher and guide; but to die in our stead, and to suffer a kind of death peculiarly painful and ignominious. He gave himself for us, not in hope of a recompense from us, but in his selfmoving goodness—in his disinterested benevolence toward us.

"The offering of Christ was a *sweetsmelling savor.*" It was pleasing and acceptable to God, and, through his appointment became efficacious to obtain pardon and grace for men. The sacrifices offered to God, according to his institution, under the Patriarchal and Mosaic dispensations, are called "a sweet savor to him;" and he is said to "smell a sweet savor in them." The Apostle uses the same phrases to express God's acceptance of Christ's sacrifice, and its virtue to take away human guilt. God's law is magnified, his character is honored, and his justice is satisfied with the work which Jesus, as our Redeemer, has accomplished. And penitent sinners, now humbly applying to the mercy of God and relying on the atonement of the Saviour, will be admitted to favor as freely and completely as if they had never offended. As Christ, who knew no sin, has been made a sinoffering for us, so we are, by faith made the righteousness of God in him. According to the terms of the new covenant, believers receive through Jesus Christ abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness—they are abundantly pardoned—their sins are extinguished as a cloud, and remembered no more. They receive life, and receive it more abundantly, than it was promised by the covenant of innocence. The righteousness of Christ has procured for them immortality far more glorious than Adam, in virtue of his own most perfect obedience, could have claimed.

This example of Christ's love to us is an argument of great force, why we should love one another. "Be ye followers of God as dear children, and walk in love,

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as Christ loved us." As ye are children of one common parent, who has expressed for you a most affectionate regard, see that you imitate his goodness in your regards for one another. If you are God's children, then you all stand in the relation of brethren. Express your gratitude to God for his parental goodness to you, by walking in love toward all his household. Dare not to indulge in your hearts hatred and enmity to those who are the objects of his love. Dare not to entertain malevolent dispositions toward any of the human race. Where will you find the man so unworthy of your love, as you are of the love of God? Since you experience that divine compassion, to which you can pretend no claim, think none of your fellow sinners too low, or too criminal to share in yours.

As God is an invisible being, whose benefits we experience, but behold not the benefactor; therefore, by a natural transition, the Apostle calls our attention to Jesus Christ, in whom the divine goodness and love are made conspicuous to sense, as well as credible to faith. Christ, who is the image of the invisible God, has manifested himself in human flesh, and rendered the divine character familiar to human apprehension. That therefore we may imitate the love of the invisible God, let us look on his visible image in the person of the wonderful Saviour and behold and admire his goodness, displayed in the example of his divine Son dwelling among men. "Be ye *followers* of *God*—as *Christ* hath loved us."

He gave himself, not only to become a man compassed with our infirmities, but also to become a victim bleeding for our iniquities. Let us put on Christ—assume his character, especially his benevolence, meekness and love. Vain are our pretensions to the character of Christians, if we have not the mind which was in Jesus, and if we walk not as he walked.

Let us cooperate with the design of his death, in our zealous endeavors to advance the glory of his

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church, and the virtue and happiness of our fellow men.

Let us condescend, in matters of indifference and doubtful disputation, to our honest and wellmeaning brethren; and if there are any whom we esteem weak, let us more cheerfully bear their burdens.

Let us forgive those who injure us, when they give us tokens of their repentance; and let us entertain unfeigned benevolence to all men, even to the most unrelenting and implicable enemies.

In our common behavior and daily conversation, let us not be assuming, but humble—not supercilious and disdainful, but meek and courteous.

Let us contribute to the happiness of those around us, by reclaiming the vicious, warning the careless, instructing the ignorant, encouraging the virtuous, relieving the necessitous and comforting the sorrowful. This is an imitation of Christ's love, and an evidence of our relation to him.

It is observable, that, in the gospel, no argument is so frequently urged, as the example of Christ, to persuade us to mutual love, because none is so well adapted to influence the mind of a Christian. And it is also worthy of remark, that God's approbation of Christian charity is expressed in the same terms, as his acceptance of the sacrifice of Christ; for charity to our fellow Christians flowing from a sense of Christ's dying love, is a virtue of distinguished excellence. As the death of Christ is called "a sacrifice for a sweetsmelling savor," so Christian charity is called "an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, well pleasing to God."—When we do good and communicate, we offer "a sacrifice with which God is well pleased."

Let it be our care to follow Christ in his goodness and love, and to learn of him humility, condescension, mercy and forgiveness. Thus it will appear, that we are his disciples.

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Religion is a plain and obvious thing. It is an imitation of the moral character of God, brought down to human view, and familiarized to human apprehension in the life of Jesus Christ.

Whenever you feel a doubt concerning the nature of religion, take your Bible, and see what is the character of God—what is the temper, which appeared in Christ—what is the life, which he lived in the flesh; and soon your doubt will be resolved. Those opinions and usages, which have no influence to promote, or prevent our conformity to the life of Christ, cannot be in any respect very useful, or very dangerous.

We see, farther, that the sacrifice of Christ is of great use, not only as an atonement for guilt, but also as an example of love. Accordingly the gospel improves it, as well to inspire us with friendly and benevolent dispositions toward one another, as to encourage our faith and hope in God's mercy. We are too apt to consider Christ's death in that single view, as opening a way for the exercise of God's mercy to us: But the gospel, besides this, represents it as intended to open our hearts to the exercises and feelings of mercy to one another. It improves it as an argument to persuade us, not only to repent of our own sins, and apply to God's forgiving love; but also to forgive one another, as God for Christ's sake forgiveth us. And until we feel on our hearts this effect of the Redeemer's death, we are not interested in the heavenly blessings procured by its merit. "If, therefore, there be any consolation in Christ, any comfort of love, any fellowship of the Spirit, any bowels and mercies; be ye likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, and of one mind. Let nothing be done through strife and vain glory; but, in lowliness of mind, let each esteem others better than himself. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others; and let that mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

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# SERMON XXXIV.

## *Against Impurity, Avarice and Foolish Jesting.*

EPHESIANS v. 3, 4, 5, 6.

*But fornication and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient; but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with vain words, for because of these things cometh the wrath of God on the children of disobedience.*

OUR Apostle is still describing the Christian life, inculcating the virtues which belong to it, and dissuading from the vices which oppose it.

The preceding verses, in this and part of the former chapter, state the Christian temper, as it respects our fellow men. The words now read inculcate Christian *sobriety*; and warn those who are called saints against imitating heathens and sinners in *uncleanness*, *covetousness* and *foolish jesting*.

I shall, first, distinctly consider the several sins which the Apostle here mentions. And, then, I shall open and apply the argument subjoined.

First: We will consider the several vices here mentioned. "Fornication and all uncleanness, and covet-



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ousness, let them not be once named among you, neither filthiness, nor foolish talking and jesting."

*Let them not be once named* in a way of approbation or extenuation. Let them not be subjects of conversation in such a manner as to encourage you in them, or inflame the criminal passions in others. Let them not appear among you, so as to give occasion for you to lament them, or for heathens to reproach you for them.

I. The first sin here mentioned is *impurity*.

*Let not fornication or uncleanness be named among you.*

The word *fornication* is sometimes used in scripture to comprehend the grosser kinds of uncleanness, as incest, adultery and prostitution; but in common speech it is usually appropriated to intimacy between unmarried persons, who are not within the forbidden degrees of consanguinity. In this limited sense we also find it used in the sacred writings.

To secure the proper nature and education of children, and to prevent confusion in private families, and in more public societies, God has instituted marriage, and ordained, that a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife. That fornication may be avoided, it is required, that every man should have his own wife, and every woman her own husband. And this relation, where it subsists, ought to be publicly known. Private contracts, generally admitted as marriage, would expose the contracting parties to dangerous frauds and impositions, the helpless offspring to fatal neglect, and society to endless confusion and disorder. Though God has not instituted any particular ceremony, by which marriage shall be solemnized, but has left it with every people to adopt such forms as they please; yet, that it should be formal and public, the scripture every where supposes, reason itself dictates, and the custom of all nations confirms.

It will not be pretended, that carnal intimacy between persons, who have deliberately agreed on mar-

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riage, is equally criminal with common prostitution; but that is really criminal in the sight of heaven, no man can doubt, when he considers what consequences would ensue from such a practice generally prevailing. Prostitutions, under pretext of private contracts, would plead excuse; honest persons would be ensnared by those who were under previous engagements; infants, from the circumstances of their birth, would often perish through neglect; a great part of the youth would grow up in ignorance and idleness; families would be subject to dissolution without remedy from law; and the depravity and confusion of families would spread through larger societies.

If the acts of uncleanness are criminal, so also are all impure thoughts and desires; for these proceed from a corrupt heart, and lead to the external acts. David prays not only that he may be kept from presumptuous sins; but that a clean heart may be created in him. The thought of foolishness is sin. He who deviseth to do evil is called a mischievous person. He who looketh on woman to lust after her, committeth adultery in his heart.

Under the name of uncleanness the gospel forbids filthy communication, which indicates a vicious disposition in the speaker, and tends also to corrupt the manners of others. The Apostle cautions saints, that uncleanness be not once *named* among them. He exhorts them to put away all *filthy communication* out of their mouths; and to have their speech always with grace, seasoned with salt; decent, modest and savory. What is more than this cometh of evil.

Farther: Christians must not make provision for the flesh to fulfil the lusts thereof; but on the contrary, abstain from fleshly lusts; yea, even from the very appearance of evil; from every thing that tends to suggest wanton ideas, to excite impure desires and to strengthen the power of temptation. They must withdraw themselves from all unnecessary connexion with

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those, who, with eyes full of adultery, beguile unstable souls, and, with their fair speeches and flattering words, cause the simple to yield. They must hate even the garments spotted with the flesh.

II. The next sin which saints are warned to avoid is *covetousness.*

This usually intends an immoderate desire of riches. Our Saviour says, "Beware of *covetousness*, for a man's life consisteth not in the *abundance* of the things, which he possesseth." The desire of possessing an *abundance*, is covetousness.

The scripture allows us to desire and seek the good things of the world; for these are necessary to our comfort and usefulness; but it always teaches us to restrain our worldly desires within narrow bounds, and keep them in a reasonable subordination to heavenly designs. The Apostle says, *Let your conversation be without covetousness, and be content with such things as ye have. Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content*, in opposition to the temper of those, *who will be rich*, and who indulging that love of the world which is the root of evil, *fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and hurtful lusts.* Our Saviour instructs us to pray, not for abundance, but for *our daily bread.* the prayer of Agur was, that God would *feed him with food convenient for him.* Similar to this was the prayer of the patriarch, that God would *give him food to eat and raiment to put on.* In opposition to worldly anxiety and carefulness, the gospel requires us to seek first the kingdom of God, leaving it with our heavenly Father to give us other things as he sees to be needful.

From hence it appears that men stand chargeable in the eye of heaven, with the sin of covetousness, not only when they practice unjust and dishonest means to accomplish their worldly ends, but when they indulge such eager and insatiable desires of riches, as make them discontented with their condition, and envious of

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the superior condition of others—such desires as divert them from the care of their souls, and extinguish a sense of futurity—such desires as urge them to a restless pursuit of riches, and fill them with tormenting and distrustful cares for the supplies of life—such desires as render them incapable of enjoying what they possess, and make them unfeeling to the necessities of others.

The nature of covetousness our Saviour illustrates in the parable of a rich man, whose fields brought forth plentifully, and who thereupon resolved to enlarge his storehouses, and, having laid up goods for many years, to spend the residue of his days in mirth and pleasure.

The parable charges him with no injustice, fraud or oppression, with no indirect measures to increase or preserve his substance; but only with a heart devoted to the world, and dead to religion. "He laid up treasure for himself, and was not rich toward God."

III. The other sin mentioned in our text, is *foolish talking* and *jesting*.

It is not every kind of *jesting*, which is to be denominated foolish talking, or pronounced sinful.

The gospel is not so rigid and austere, as to debar us from innocent pleasures and harmless amusements. Whatever may contribute to the improvement of happiness, and is not productive of evil to ourselves or others, is not only innocent, but really good. Providence, merely for our pleasure and enjoyment, bestows many delicacies, which are not immediately necessary to the support of life; so religion tolerates, for the amusement of the mind, some diversions which have no immediate connexion with our salvation. If it is innocent to refresh the body by a social walk, it is as innocent to exhilerate the mind by humorous discourse. If vocal or instrumental music, abstract from sentiment, and merely as an entertainment, is not inconsistent with piety; no more is a little wit and gaiety among friends in their free and social visits. There is a time to laugh,

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as well as a time to weep. Cheerful conversation is often of real use to enliven the drooping spirits and dispel gloomy cares, to endear society, and sweeten the pleasures of friendship.

*Jesting* is not foolish, or inconvenient, when it is made use of to expose the absurdity of error, and the folly of vice. There are some errors too gross for serious argumentation, and there are some minds too callous to feel force of grave and pointed reasoning. In such cases wit and redicule are sometimes applied with success.

Can you imagine any thing more ludicrous and satyrical than Elijah's advice to the besotted priests of Baal? He mocked them and said, "Cry aloud, for he is a God; either he is talking, or he is pursuing, or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth and must be awaked." The style of the ancient prophets is remarkable for its gravity and solemnity; and yet in no author do we meet with a finer and keener piece of raillery, than in the book of Isaiah. Representing the ridiculous foolery of the worshipper of carved images, he says, "He planteth an ash, and the rain doth nourish it; he burneth part of it in the fire, and with part of it he eateth meat; he baketh bread, he roasteth flesh and is satisfied; he warmeth himself and saith, ah, ha, I am warm, I have seen the fire. And the *residue* thereof he maketh a God, even his graven image. He falleth down to it and worshippeth it, and prayeth unto it, and saith, Deliver me for thou art my God."

Sarcastic wit is not, however, a weapon ordinarily to be used by preachers, though sometimes used by the prophets. Few men have judgment to point it properly, or skill to manage it successfully. In awkard hands it may wound truth, and leave error to escape unhurt.

Since there are cases, in which wit and humor may be innocent, and even useful, it will be asked, What is that *jesting* which the Apostle condemns?

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As jesting stands here connected with *filthiness* and *foolish talking*, we may suppose he particularly intends *lewd* and *obscene* jesting; or what he before calls corrupt communication, such as tends to inflame the lusts of the profligate, to debauch the minds of the simple, and to wound the ears of the modest. Lewd conversation and obscene writings are always criminal and dangerous; but most so when they are recommended by the fascinating charms of a lively wit and humorous imagination.

*Profane* jesting is also condemned. If we may sometimes indulge a sportive fancy in our friendly conversation, yet we may never trifle with sacred things, make a mock of sin, employ the word of God as the subject of humor and drollery, and turn the awful doctrines of religion into merriment and ridicule. Such jesting proceeds from a vain and impious heart, and will increase unto more ungodliness.

*Reviling* and *defamatory* jesting is unbecoming among Christians. They are not to speak evil one of another, nor indeed of any man except when some serious occasion requires it, and truth will justify it. Evil speaking never wounds so deeply, nor infuses in the wound such fatal poison, as when it is sharpened by wit and urged home by ridicule. A clumsy, dull expression, however defamatory, is little regarded and soon forgotten. But wit gives edge to abuse, and adds wings to scandal. The story is remembered for the humor and repeated for the pleasantry; repetition gives it credit and circulation; and a virtuous worthy man, only for a natural infirmity or innocent singularity, becomes an object of ridicule and contempt. But he who thus utters a slander is a fool; for though he may excite the laughter of the vain, he becomes the abhorrence of the wise; and while he holds up his neighbor as an object of derision, he exposes himself to general hatred. The man who values himself on witty conceits and satyrical touches, makes no distinction of

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objects; and they who laugh at his jesting today, may themselves become the subjects of his humor tomorrow. He sacrifices truth and friendship to his predominant passion, and thus alienates his friends, and renders all men his enemies.

Having considered the nature of the several vices which the Apostle warns Christians to avoid, we will, secondly, attend to the arguments subjoined.

1. The Apostle tells us, that Impurity, covetousness and foolish talking are *unbecoming in saints.*

Christians are called to be holy, to imitate the character of God, and to be conformed to the image of his Son, to walk under the influence of the Holy Spirit, and to prepare for a world wherein dwelleth righteousness, and into which nothing enters that defiles. They who are Christ's have crucified the flesh. They who walk in the Spirit, will not fulfil the lusts of the flesh. They who are delivered from this evil world, seek the things which are above, and place their affections there. They mortify their members which are on the earth, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence and covetousness. If Heathens walk in the lusts of uncleanness, and according to the course of the world, yet a different conversation may be expected from Christians, who have been taught the true character of God, have known the truth as it is in Jesus, and have seen the heavenly world displayed before them. "Ye were sometime darkness," says the Apostle, "but now light in the Lord; walk as children of light."

2. Foolish talking and jesting *are not convenient*, as the Heathens imagined them to be, but are criminal in their nature, and fatal in their tendency.

This Apostle says to the converted Romans, "What fruit had ye then in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death." This vain talking is contrary to the design of speech, which is to glorify God, and to edify and comfort one

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another. Therefore the Apostle adds, *Rather give thanks.* A man addicted to vain language, dissipates a sense of piety, and extinguishes a spirit of gratitude and devotion. Out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh. In a heart filled with vain and trifling thoughts, there is no room for pure and spiritual sentiments and affections: From such a heart will proceed evil speakings; and till the heart is purified, vain words will have no end.

Such talk is hurtful to the hearers. It wounds the feelings of the virtuous, and awakens the corrupt dispositions of the vicious. It often provokes anger, brings on contention, corrupts good manners, separates near friends, and, in short, leads to every evil work. It is sound speech, speech seasoned with wisdom, that ministers grace to the hearers. "The lips of the righteous feed many, but fools die for want of wisdom."

3. The Ephesian Christians are warned, that the indulgence of these sins is inconsistent with a title to heaven. Whatever they might think in the time of their ignorance; yet now, says the Apostle, "Ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God."

However imperfect our ideas of the heavenly state may be, one thing is exceedingly plain, that it is a state of holiness, and that our happiness there must chiefly consist in holy dispositions and exercises; hence we may certainly conclude, that no man can enter into it without a previous preparation by the renewal and sanctification of his mind. It is the constant language of the gospel, that without holiness no man shall see the Lord. To these Ephesians, who had been taught the truth as it is in Jesus, the Apostle says, "this ye know, that no unclean person has any inheritance in that spiritual kingdom." And to the Corinthians he says, "Know ye not that the unright-



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eous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor effeminate, nor covetous shall inherit this kingdom."

4. The Apostle tells them, that these sins, not only exclude them from heaven, but bring upon them *the wrath of God.* "Let no man deceive you with vain words, for because of these things cometh the wrath of God on the children of disobedience."

Evil men often act as seducers; they practise every art of deception and enticement, to draw others into a partnership with them in wickedness. They call evil good; and good evil; they put darkness for light, and light for darkness. To hide from the eyes of the simple the shamefulness and deformity of vice, they spread over it fair and tempting colors; and that the incautious may mistake the nature of moral good and evil, they confound them by false and fictitious names. Strict virtue they deride as superstition; and humble devotion they stigmatize as hypocrisy: They applaud licentiousness as manly freedom; and commend the boldness of impiety as indicating a greatness of soul.

But let men say what they please, still there is an essential difference between virtue and vice; and all arguments used to confound them, are but *vain words;* and with *these* let no man deceive you. Hearken to no enticements which would draw you away from the plain path of virtue; enter into no particular connexions with persons of licentious principles and corrupt manners; choose for your companions them who fear God and keep his commandments. Steadily and invariably follow the plain precepts of the gospel; and, whatever attempts may be made to explain away the meaning, or to relax the strictness of them, still remember, that by *these,* and not by the licentious opinions of men, you must finally be judged. If you mistake them, it is at your peril; if you despise them you must take the consequence. The gospel has

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plainly denounced the wrath of God against uncleanness, covetousness and foolish talking and jesting. Be not deceived with vain words. The threatenings of God are words of truth and soberness. If you doubt the certain execution of them, yet he cannot deny himself; he is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent. If you doubt whether the precepts of the gospel are to be understood in the extent, which the words seem to import, still remember, they are the precepts of God. He trifles not with man, nor may man trifle with him. Take them as he has given them, and let your hearts be conformed to them, and your practice directed by them. Think not to plead in excuse for your sins, that you were deceived by the opinions of men. You are to call no man on earth your master. God is not mocked; whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he reap. Eve was deceived by the serpent who flattered her, that transgression would not be death. On this deception she transgressed, and death ensued. She pleaded that the serpent *beguiled* her; but the plea was not admitted in bar of sentence. The prophet, who disobeyed the express command of God, in compliance with the advice of another prophet, pretending an order from God to revoke the former command, perished in his presumption. He was not to transgress an order given immediately to himself, on the insinuation of another, that it was now superseded. The command which he had received he knew to be from God; the information of the other prophet was only the word of man.

We are to take the scriptures as they are, and though one should pretend to the inspiration of the Spirit, and to immediate revelation from God, yet we are not to regard him in opposition to the plain and obvious sense of the sacred oracles. The Apostle says, "Though we, or an angel from heaven preach any other gospel, than that which ye have received, let him be accursed."

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# SERMON XXXV.

## *Against Fellowship in Unfruitful Works.*

EPHESIANS v. 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.

*Be ye not therefore partakers with them. For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord: Walk as children of light, (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness and truth) proving what is acceptable to the Lord. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. For it is a shame to speak of those things, which are done of them in secret.*

THE several vices enumerated in the preceding verses, are fornication, uncleanness, covetousness, filthiness, foolish talking, and profane and wanton jesting. These were practised among the heathens in their dark and ignorant state. The Apostle warns the Ephesians, now enlightened by the gospel, that they no longer have fellowship with their neighbors in these unfruitful and pernicious works—that they avoid not only the direct commission of, but all partnership in these and all other sins, which the gospel has detected and condemned. We will,

I. Illustrate this fellowship in wickedness. And,

II. Apply the arguments, which the Apostle, in the words now read, urges against it.

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I. We will illustrate this fellowship in wickedness, which Christians are exhorted to avoid.

If by any means we cooperate with sinners, countenance them in their evil works, strengthen their hands, hinder their repentance and reformation; if we neglect to restrain them, when it is in our power, or to rebuke them when we have opportunity; or if we take a secret pleasure in their sins, even though we do nothing directly to encourage them, we have fellowship with them.

1. Not to oppose, in any cases, is to embolden transgressors, and to be partakers with them.

Rulers are to be a terror unto evil works. The nobles of Judah are said to have profaned the sabbath, when they suffered the men of Tyre to come into the city, and sell wares on the sabbath day. The ministers of religion are charged to bear public testimony against prevailing error and vice, and to rebuke, before all men, such as walk contrary to the gospel, that they may not be partakers of other men's sins, but may keep themselves pure. If these watchmen speak not to warn the wicked of his evil way, that he may save his soul, the same wicked man will die in his iniquity; but his blood will be required at their hands. The parent is commanded to bring up his children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. If they make themselves vile, and he restrains them not, he is a partaker with them in their guilt, and God will judge his house.

2. We have more direct fellowship with the wicked, when we encourage them by our example.

We are to provide things honest and commendable in the sight of all men, that they by our good conversation may be gained over to the interest of virtue. The ill example of men in a distinguished station gives a sort of sanction to vice. Few are so obscure in life, but that they may find some who are subject to their influence. The parent, the master of a family, the aged Christian, the professor of religion may within his cir-

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cle do much to prejudice, and much to promote the cause of religion. It concerns every man, in regard to others as well as to himself, to be careful what manner of person he is. If we practice iniquity under any circumstances we must bear the burden of our own guilt; but if by an open example of vice we corrupt others, our burden will be accumulated by a participation of their guilt. Yea, such a tender concern ought we to feel for the virtue of those around us, as to forbear in their presence those innocent liberties, which might encourage them to real transgression. "Take heed," says the Apostle, "lest by any means your liberty become a stumbling block to them that are weak. For if a man see thee, who hast knowledge, sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him that is weak be emboldened to eat things, which are offered to idols?"

3. They who provoke and incite others to *evil works*, have fellowship with them.

This may be done by the propagation of licentious opinions, which confound the difference between virtue and vice. It was a horrible thing in the prophets of Jerusalem, that they walk in lies, caused the people to err, and strengthened the hands of evil doers, that none did return from his wickedness. *Elymas* the sorcerer is called an enemy of all righteousness, because he perverted the right ways of the Lord, and sought to turn away others from the faith. They who are led away with the errors of the wicked, must bear their guilt. And they who diffuse the errors, must answer for the consequences. Both are bringing on themselves swift destruction.

This may also be affected by direct persuasions and enticements. The wise man, aware of the dangers to which youth in a licentious age are exposed, gives this salutary caution; "When sinners entice you, consent ye not."—"Enter not into the path of the wicked, nor go in the way of evil men; for they sleep not except

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they have done mischief; and their sleep is taken away except they cause some to fall." It was the most infamous part of Jeroboam's character, that by erecting his golden calves, and recommending the worship of them, he made Israel to sin. The prophet denounces the curse of God against the man, who giveth his neighbor drink, and by putting the bottle to him maketh him drunken.

To suggest the means of executing a wicked design is to make ourselves accomplices in it. Balaam, though he was restrained from cursing Israel, yet taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before them, and draw them into idolatry, which he knew, would bring down upon them the curse of God. Balaam therefore perished among those who committed this trespass against the Lord.

The instigators of evil are involved in a common guilt with the immediate actors. Paul calls himself a *blasphemer*, because he punished the saints in every city and compelled *them* to blaspheme.

There are some, who plead in defence of particular vices, deride a godly life, and treat the solemn truths of the gospel with an air of contempt. These, by their insolent mockery, destroy much good, and add strength to the cause of infidelity and vice. The man, indeed, who can be laughed out of his religion, has never deeply felt the power of it in his heart. But these mockers will have a distinguished share in the punishment and perdition of ungodly men. Peculiar marks of God's displeasure will be impressed on those who corrupt the earth with their abominations.

4. They who explicitly consent to, and actually join with sinners in their evil works, have fellowship with them.

The Jews, who hired Judas to betray his Lord, and extorted from Pilate a sentence of death against the Saviour, are called his *betrayers* and *murderers*. Saul, who stood by and kept the raiment of the men who

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stoned Stephen, was consenting to his death, and involved in the guilt of it. We are in any wise to rebuke our brother, and not suffer sin upon him. If then, instead of bearing testimony against the sins of others, we actually concur with them, we are partakers of their guilt; and it is a circumstance of little importance, who were first in the transgression. So afraid was David, lest he should help the ungodly, that he would not even countenance them by his presence. He says, "I have not sat with vain persons, nor gone with dissemblers: I hate the congregation of evil doers: I will not sit with the wicked." Resolving to keep the commandments of his God, he said to evil doers, "Depart from me."

5. To comfort and uphold sinners in their wickedness is to have fellowship with them.

God commands that a mark of approbation be set on the men who sigh and cry for the abominations done in the land. David beheld the transgressors and was grieved. The Apostle reprehends the church in Corinth, that she had not mourned for the gross iniquity committed by one of her members. He teaches the Thessalonians, that if any professor of religion walk disorderly among them, they are to note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. If then we have pleasure in them who do evil, make them our intimate companions, seek their society, and appear to take satisfaction in their frothy and vain conversation, and ludicrous treatment of serious things, we are partakers with them.

6. There are some who rejoice in iniquity, when they have lent no hand to accomplish it.

It is no uncommon thing for men to rejoice in the iniquity of an enemy—of one who is their competitor in business, trade or preferment—of one who belongs to another sect in religion, or party in politics. Have you never observed with what apparent pleasure some will receive and spread reports, to the disadvantage of

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one, against whom, on some such account, they have entertained a prejudice? How they love to dwell on the infamous story? How uneasy they appear, if you question the truth of it? Are they not inwardly glad at the opportunity of casting reproach on the man who stands in their way? How many are there, who in a way of sport and merriment speak of other men's fault's, and delight to make them the subject of laughter and diversion? Do not these rejoice in iniquity? Bring the question nearer home: Have you never perceived an inward pleasure, when the man, whom you hated, has by some gross misconduct exposed himself to infamy? Have you not enjoyed his iniquity as gain to yourself? Have you never been sensibly gratified in hearing the faults of others talked over and spread around, though perhaps you was not the author or propagator of the scandal? Now, by this rejoicing in iniquity you make yourself a partaker of it. By your satisfaction in other men's sins, you assume a share in the guilt of them.

We have illustrated the nature of fellowship in sin. We proceed,

II. To apply the arguments which the Apostle urges against it.

1. One argument is taken from the *superior light*, which Christians enjoy. "Be not partakers with the children of disobedience; for ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord. Walk as children of light, proving what is acceptable to the Lord."

Heathens are in a state of darkness, and they practise the works of darkness. You are by the gospel brought into a state of light. You have been taught the different nature and consequences of sin and holiness. Will you still walk, as the Heathens walk, in the vanity of their mind? Will you have fellowship with them? What communion hath light with darkness? What part hath the believer with an infidel?



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Whatever excuses may be made for the sins of Heathens, these cannot be pleaded in your favor. You have known your Lord's will, and if you do it not, you will be beaten with many stripes. Think what a privilege you enjoy in your distinction from the unenlightened world. Why has God made you to differ? Has his goodness laid you under no obligation? Will you still walk, as if you remained in darkness? Will you still promote the interest of the kingdom of darkness? Will you do nothing to rescue your fellow mortals from that deplorable state, in which you see them *lying*; but, on the contrary, endeavor to fix them there by your fellowship with them? Who would expect this from you? Have no more fellowship with them, but rather reprove them. This argument the Apostle Peter presses on Christians with great force. "Ye are a chosen generation, a peculiar people, that ye should shew forth the praises of him who has called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.—Dearly beloved, I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims, that ye abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul; having your conversation honest among the Gentiles, that they, by your good works which they behold, may glorify God in the day of visitation.

2. Another argument against this fellowship with sinners, is taken from the *grace* of the *Holy Spirit*, of which believers are the subjects. "Be not partakers with them, for the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness, and righteousness and truth."

The gospel is a ministration of the Spirit. As it came to men attended with the demonstration of the Spirit in signs and wonders, so it was at first, and is still accompanied with his kind and gracious influence on the hearts of men, for the awakening and conviction of sinners, and for the sanctification and comfort of believers. All true believers have the fellowship of the Spirit. They are partakers of his renewing and transforming power. The fruit of the Spirit is opposite to

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the works of darkness: It is in all goodness, and righteousness and truth. And what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? They who walk in the Spirit will not fulfil the lusts of the flesh. This Spirit can have no fellowship with that which works in the children of disobedience; for the design, operation and fruit of these two Spirits are opposite to each other. If then we profess to have been renewed in our minds, and to be still governed in our lives by the Spirit of God, let us have no communion with sinners in their unfruitful works, but rather reprove them. Let us support our character by works of a different kind—by those works of holiness, which are the true and genuine fruits of the Spirit of God.

3. The Apostle teaches us, that the works of darkness are *unfruitful*.

Gain is the object of all worldly partnerships. If you knew a number of men, who had combined in the prosecution of a business, from which no profit could possibly accrue, but its obvious tendency was to poverty, slavery and death, would you think of joining them? Would you not be astonished at their strange infatuation? Have no fellowship then in the works of wickedness, for in this nothing is gained, but every thing lost. Paul demands of the Roman converts, "What fruit had ye then in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death."

Though you had no higher aim, than worldly peace, prosperity and enjoyment, it would be your wisdom to adhere with invariable constancy to the rules of sobriety, justice, truth and goodness. "Godliness has the promise of the life which now is." This will prevent ruinous habits, will give tranquillity and contentment to the mind, will procure favor and good understanding with men, and bring down the blessings of divine Providence; in a word, it is profitable to all things. The reverse are the consequences of vice and impiety.

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Righteousness tendeth to life, but he who pursueth evil, pursueth it to his death." You may indeed see men of piety in a state of sickness, poverty and affliction. But did their piety bring them into this state? Would ungodliness have secured them against it? Or will it now deliver them from it? There is not a virtue, in the whole system of practical religion, which will injure a man in his health, reputation or substance. And there is not a vice, which can be practised with safety. Will you then have fellowship in wickedness? You act contrary to all those rules of prudence, which govern you in other partnerships. Your commerce is not only unprofitable, but ruinous.

4. This is a *shameful* fellowship.

The Apostle says, "It is a shame even to speak of those things, which are done by them in secret." He alludes probably to those abominable excesses and impurities, practised by the Heathens, in the nocturnal festivals which they celebrated in honor of their deities. These were such as decency forbad him to name.

Sin is in itself a shameful thing. It is an opposition to the character and will of the Creator—a rebellion against his authority and government—a contradiction to the end and design of our existence—a degradation of our nature, a perversion of our powers, and an extinction of our liberty. It destroys all that is noble and excellent in the man, defaces the divine image in his soul, and sinks him to a level with brutal nature.

Partnership in evil works brings us into dishonorable connexions—into connexion with the children of disobedience, the enemies of God and men; and into connexion with that evil spirit who works in the children of disobedience. When we cooperate with sinners, we take up the trade of that accursed being who was banished from heaven; we enter into fellowship with him, who goes about seeking whom he may destroy. The Apostle says, "I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils."

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Partnership in iniquity is shameful, as it betrays a rash and foolish confidence; a confidence in those who are not to be trusted. Wicked men may solicit your concurrence with them in their evil designs; but they will desert you in the day of trouble. They may employ you as a tool to accomplish their purpose; but will not console you in the anguish of guilt, nor deliver you from the punishment of your wickedness.

The rulers of the Jews covenanted with Judas to betray his master into their hands. But when filled with the horror of remorse, he threw back the wages of his perfidy, and confessed, "I have sinned in betraying innocent blood," they, insensible to his distress, replied, "What is that to us? See *thou* to that."

*5.* If we have fellowship with sinners in their works, we must share with them in their punishment.

The Apostle says, "The wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience. Be not ye partakers with them."

The like warning God gives to his people at the approaching destruction of Babylon; "Come out of her my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues." Solomon observes, that "a companion of fools will be destroyed. —Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished." All who are concerned in the work of iniquity, must divide among them the fatal reward—a reward not diminished, but often augmented by their mutual concurrence with, and reciprocal influence upon each other. If we would stand clear of the guilt, we must abstain from the appearance of evil.

It becomes you now to review the various ways in which men form a fellowship in sin, and to examine whether you are concerned in such a vain, such a ruinous commerce. Have you never by example, enticement, countenance or concurrence, drawn others into iniquity? Have you never taken pleasure in them who do evil? Have you rather reproved and restrained

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them? If any such partnership has subsisted, it is high time that you dissolve it—that you withdraw yourselves and reclaim your associates from so fatal a confederacy. If you have destroyed much good, it concerns you, by all means in your power, to restore it. Perhaps you cannot undo all the evil which you have done, nor recal the virtue which you have expelled. But, at least, by repentance save your own souls; and, by your good conversation, encourage the repentance of others.

Let all be persuaded to a different kind of *fellowship*, a fellowship in the fruitful works of holiness and light. Consider one another to provoke unto love and good works. Exhort one another daily, lest any be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Take heed lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled. Give diligence to reclaim the wicked and encourage the virtuous. He who *converteth* a sinner from the error of his ways, shall save a soul from death and hide the multitude of sins.

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# SERMON XXXVI.

## *Sleeping Sinners Called to Awake.*

EPHESIANS v. 13, 14.

*But all things that are reproved are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light. Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.*

THE words, to which the Apostle here alludes, are in the beginning of the sixteenth chapter of Isaiah. "Arise shine," or be enlightened, "for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people; but the Lord shall arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee." To the Gentiles the Apostle applies these words, as a call to awake from their slumbers, and enjoy the light of the gospel newly risen upon them.

This call addressed to the Ephesians may with equal propriety be addressed to multitudes in the Christian world; for though the light shines, they open not their eyes, but continue in the same dead sleep as if darkness still covered them.

Sleep and death are metaphors often used in scripture, to express the moral state, not only of Heathens, but also of sinners in general; and especially of such

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as are secure and thoughtless in their sins. To such slumbering souls I shall now apply the call in the text: And I beg that you will watch one hour.

I shall describe the *character* of the persons to whom the call is directed, open the *call* itself; and press the argument in the text.

I. Let us attend to the character of the persons here addressed: They are such as are in a state of *sleep*.

In vain is the call in the text addressed to you, unless you are convinced, that you are the men. The most exact description of your character, unless you hear and apply it, will give you no conviction. If you can sit inattentive to a subject in which you are so nearly concerned, it is manifest, that you are under a Spirit of slumber, and, with respect to you, the inquiry may stop here. But let me hope better things of you, though I thus speak. To proceed then,

1. If you allow yourselves in the practice of *known wickedness*, your conscience is asleep.

"The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness." If you had any just apprehension of this wrath, you would not take pleasure in unrighteousness: You would be anxious for deliverance from it. While therefore you indulge iniquity in your heart, you are in a state of sleep; your conscience is unfeeling to guilt, your reason is blind to interest, and your soul is dead to a sense of danger.

Think not that your condition is safe, because there are *some* vices which you avoid." Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God?" If you are such, in any respect, you must be renewed and sanctified by the Spirit of God.

You say, "*Good* men are imperfect—they offend in many things." This is true; but they pursue not a *course* of sin; they yield not themselves *servants* to it; they *obey* it not in the lusts thereof. When through infirmity or temptation they are led astray,

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they think on their ways, and turn their feet unto God's testimonies. A conviction of their transgressions brings them on their knees before God, and their pious sorrow works in them carefulness. Is this your character?—There is then ground of hope and comfort. But if, on the contrary, in your general resolutions, you make reserves in favor of this or that sin—if you deliberately contrive the commission of iniquity—if you repeat it often without remorse, and run into temptations without caution—if, when you have done evil, you seek excuses to pacify your conscience—if the imperfections of good men, instead of exciting you to vigilance, encourage you to selfflattery—if the mercy of God, which should lead you to repentance, emboldens you to continue in sin—what will you say?—Do you not love and choose wickedness? Is not your heart set in you to do evil?

2. If you live in the customary neglect of *selfexamination*, you are in a state of slumber.

One who is awake to religion, regards it as the one thing needful. He is solicitous to know, whether he possesses the temper, and is entitled to the blessings of it. He examines himself, whether he is in the faith, and proves his works, whether they are wrought in God. That sense of the importance of religion, which engages him in the practice of it, makes him attentive to the exercises of his heart and the actions of his life, that he may know what manner of man he is. This is his prayer, "Search me, O God, and try my heart; prove me and know my thoughts: See if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting." Inquire then whether under a serious concern to know your state, you are conversant with your own hearts—whether you often bring them to the law and to the testimony, and try them by the rules which you find there.

But here, I would observe to you; though the entire neglect of selfexamination proves you to be in a



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state of sin, it is not every kind of selfexamination, that will prove the contrary. Sinners, who are usually asleep, may at times rouse up, and spend a few thoughts on their dangerous state, and then sink back into their slumbers. Yea, there is such a thing as making selfexamination a mean of selfdeception. If you attend only to those things which seem favorable, and overlook every thing of a contrary aspect— if you dwell upon the good actions you have done, and spread them as a cloak over your iniquities—if you regard only your external conduct, and never explore the motives by which you have been governed—if you compare yourselves with others, and conclude that all is well, because you see in them certain vices, which you have not practised; you are but like the Pharisee, who trusted in himself, that he was righteous, because he was not as other men were, extortioners, unjust and adulterers; and yet never considered the pride, uncharitableness and arrogance, which were in his heart. Your aim, in such a kind of examination, is only to persuade yourselves, that your state is good; not to know whether it really is so. This examination will terminate in stronger delusion.

3. If you have never been, in any degree, affected with a sense of your guilt, and of your dependence on the mercy of God in Christ, you are among those who are asleep.

The gospel supposes men to be sinners, and as such to need the salvation which it brings. It is absurd to offer pardon to the guiltless, and vain to offer it to those who think themselves so. Christ came, not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance— not to save those who are out of danger, but to seek them who are lost. In order to repentance, you must be convinced, that you are sinners. In order to your accepting salvation from Christ, you must see yourselves to be lost. Nothing can be more manifest, on the least reflection, than that, by violating God's holy

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law, we have fallen into condemnation, from which we cannot deliver ourselves. An insensibility of this state is an evidence of a spirit of slumber.

The just live by faith in the Son of God. This faith is something more than a speculative belief, that the Son of God is the saviour of men. As much as this the devils believe. It is such a humbling view of our guilt, and such a sensible persuasion of his authority, grace and sufficiency to save the guilty, as brings the soul to submit to him in all his characters. Conviction of sin must precede faith in Christ. The law, which gives the knowledge of our guilt, is a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. Paul was alive without the law; but when the commandment came home to his conscience, sin revived in his apprehension, and he saw himself to be dead. Then he complained, O wretched man that I am! Then he inquired, who shall deliver me from this death? And then he gave thanks to God, that there was deliverance through Jesus Christ the Lord.

Here, my friends, renew the enquiry—What report does your conscience make on the question under consideration?—Can you say, that, under a deep conviction of your pollution and guilt, you have earnestly desired, diligently sought, and humbly accepted the deliverance offered in the gospel? Or must you confess, that you have lived strangers to this conviction?

Think it not sufficient, that, on the authority of scripture, which pronounces all men sinners, you are free to acknowledge *yourselves* such. If this is all your conviction, it is no more to your purpose, than your acknowledgment, that the *Turks* or *Algerienes* are sinners. The conviction must not hover around at a distance; it must settle upon yourselves. You must see *your own* sinfulness—*your own* desert of God's wrath—*your own* dependence on the great Saviour of sinners. If you have had no such view of yourselves,

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you are yet concerned in the call, *Awake thou that sleepest and arise from the dead.*

4. If you have no conflicts with sin and temptation, you are in a state of slumber.

The Christian life is a warfare, not only with flesh and blood, but also with principalities and powers, wicked Spirits, and the rulers of the darkness of this world. The remains of sin, the motions of the flesh, the objects of the world, the examples of sinners, and the temptations of Satan, oppose the Christian in his heavenly course. If he would proceed with constancy, he must wrestle with all these. From this warfare nothing can free us, but absolute victory, or total subjection. The Christian, in this state of imperfection, never gains such an entire conquest over his enemies, as to spoil them of all their power. Though he is delivered from their dominion, he is not freed from their molestation.

If then you know not what it means to resist temptations, to strive against corruptions, to deny yourselves, to crucify the flesh; you are led captive by your enemies at their will.

You may, indeed, have some inward struggles with sin, when you are not delivered from its dominion. An alarming providence, the forebodings of conscience, a sense of shame, a regard to interest, may, at times, excite you to some opposition against particular sins, when there is no principle of holiness in your hearts. But then, if there are no conflicts of this kind, you are in bondage to iniquity. Sin has full, uncontrouled dominion over you.

5. The prevalence of a sensual and carnal disposition is a sign of spiritual death.

They who have risen with Christ to a spiritual life, have set their affections on things above; their conversation is in heaven; they walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit; they are laying up treasure in heaven, and their hearts are with their treasure. If you

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are strangers to such a life as this; if the glory of heaven has never appeared to you in such a light, as to make you despise and forego every thing which comes in competition with it; if you are carrying on a scheme for this world only, and not for the future; if you have no delight in the exercises of religion, nor desire of God's favor; if you can live contented without the present tokens of his love, and without the hope of a future admission to the presence of his glory; you are under the influence of spiritual slumber—you are dead in trespasses and sin.

6. Stupidity under the warnings of God's word and providence, indicates such a state of soul, as the scripture compares to sleep.

The Christian, renewed in the spirit of his mind, has a quick and lively sense of divine things—he has a heart which is tender, apt to be impressed with the concerns of religion, open to conviction of, and susceptible of relentings for sin. When he is warned of God, he is moved with fear. He is afraid of God's judgments and trembles at his word. This spiritual sensibility is an essential property of the new creature.

What is your temper? Is it the reverse of this? Is your heart unfeeling to guilt and danger? Is it impenetrable to the sword of the Spirit? Can you hear the impenitent sinner described by characters, which directly apply to you, and yet not be affected with your awful state? Can you hear the warnings of God's word and providence proclaimed, and yet feel no solicitude; but still flatter yourselves that you shall have peace?—You are as one that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or that sleepeth on the top of the mast.

7. The soul, in which the temper of the gospel is formed, hungers and thirsts after righteousness, desires spiritual growth, and reaches after perfection. How is it with you? Are you unacquainted with the aspirations of the humble soul after holy and heavenly improvements? Are you contented with the attainments,

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which you suppose you have already made? Does your hope of heaven make you careless and negligent in duty? Do you rest satisfied with such a measure of goodness, as you imagine, may be sufficient to save you from hell? If this is your spirit and temper, all your religion is vain, and all your hopes are delusive.

The true Christian loves God's word, because he is thereby instructed, encouraged and quickened in his duty. He loves divine ordinances, because he is thereby nourished in faith and holiness. As a new born babe he desires this sincere milk, that he may grow thereby. His holy desires excite him to prayer. He maintains a daily communion with God. He comes to the throne of grace, that he may obtain grace to help in time of need. If then you live in a careless and customary neglect of these instituted means of religion, you are, undoubtedly, in that indolent state of mind, which our text expresses by the metaphors of *sleep* and *death*.

To you, then, I may, with great propriety, and God grant, I may with equal success,

II. Open and apply the call in the text, *Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead.*

1. This *awaking* must suppose and imply a conviction of your sin, and a sense of your danger.

Exhortations to repentance are addressed, without effect, to those who know not that they are miserable and wretched. When such are urged to return unto God, their language is, Wherein shall we return?

Compare yourselves with the law of God, that you may obtain the knowledge of sin; bring home to yourselves the threatenings of the law, that sin may appear exceeding sinful.

The call in the text is a warning of your danger. It is like that of the shipmaster to Jonah, sleeping in a storm: "What meanest thou, O sleeper? Arise, call upon thy God." It is like that of the prophet to the self-flattering sinners in Judah; "Rise up, ye that are at

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ease; hear my voice, ye careless ones; many days and years shall ye be troubled."

Consider, I beseech you, my friends, what a condition you are in. God has appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness. The punishment, which he will inflict on those of your character, is great beyond conception. The scripture represents it by the most awful images and similitudes. Whatever may be their particular import, they evidently signify, in general, that the punishment which awaits the ungodly will be perpetual and extreme. Though it will not be executed in full measure, until the final judgment, yet it will undoubtedly, *begin* at the time of death. The rich man, when he died, lifted up his eyes in hell, being in torments. This is not spoken by way of anticipation; for at this time, he had five brethren in his father's house, to whom he wished a special warning might be sent, lest they should come to that place of torment. You are, therefore, now exposed to this punisment. It is only the precarious breath of your nostrils, which suspends it.

Your danger is much increased by your carelessness, because this renders your repentance more doubtful. While your carelessness continues, your danger is daily growing greater; for you are adding sin to sin; you are abusing the mercy and patience of God; you are hardening your heart more and more; you are sinking from slumber to sleep, from sleep to death, in your trespasses and sins. It is therefore high time to awake; for while you say, peace and safety, destruction is coming upon you; and "your iniquity shall be to you as a breach ready to fall, swelling out in a high wall, whose breaking cometh suddenly in an instant."

2. This awaking from sleep, and arising from the dead, implies a real *repentance* of sin, and *turning* to God.

"Awake to righteousness," says the Apostle, "and sin not." "The night is far spent, the day is at hand; it is high time to awake out of sleep. Let us there-

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fore put off the works of darkness, and put on the armor of light."—"Put on the breast plate of faith and love, and for an helmet the hope of salvation." Arise and come forth, dressed in robes, and equipped with armor suitable for the business and dangers of the day. The import of the metaphor here used, is more literally expressed by your being renewed in the Spirit of your mind, and putting off the old man with his deeds, and putting on the new man which is created after the image of God. Think not then, that you have complied with this call, until your hearts are changed from the habitual love of sin, to the love of universal holiness; and conclude not, that you are the subjects of this change, until you experience the abiding fruits of it in your tempers and lives. This leads me to say,

8. They, who have awoke from their sleep and risen from the dead, will experience the properties, and maintain the exercises of a holy and spiritual life.

They will be *heavenly minded.* Being risen with Christ, they will set their affection on things above, for Christ is there, and their interest is there.

They will be *watchful* against sin and temptation. They will no more have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness; but rather reprove them. They will walk circumspectly, and abstain from the appearance of evil.

They will have a *tenderness* of conscience; a heart of flesh in opposition to the heart of stone. This will discover itself in a humble jealousy of themselves, in a careful inspection of their tempers and lives, in a ready conviction of sin, and easy relentings for it.

They will walk in *newness of life,* studying what is acceptable in the sight of God. They will no more yield themselves to sin, but will yield themselves to God, as those who are alive from the dead, and their members instruments of righteousness to him.

They will delight *in prayer.* The soul born from above, looks upward, and tends to his native place. It

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was said of Paul, after his conversion, "Behold, he prayeth." Paul had doubtless prayed before; for he was a Pharisee; and the Pharisees prayed long and often. But his Phariseean prayers are not reckoned here. Now it is said; "Behold he prayeth." He prayed, as a man ought to do, from his heart. His soul quickened to a new life, felt new desires, and made new requests.

They will aspire after *improvements* in knowledge and holiness, and delight in the means of spiritual growth. Babes in Christ long for the stature of perfect men.

You see then, what this rising from the dead means. Let us now,

III. Attend to the *encouragement*, which the text contains. "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and *Christ shall give thee light*"—shall shine upon and enlighten thee.

1. This may be understood as a promise of pardon and eternal life on your repentance.

"Repent and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out." However great and numerous they are, they may all be forgiven through the blood of your Redeemer. This cleanses from all sin." "The righteousness of God through the faith of Christ is unto all who believe, and there is no difference." The greatness of your guilt is no obstruction to God's pardoning mercy—it is only your impenitence which excludes you from the hopes of the gospel. See, what light arises in darkness.

2. The words farther import God's gracious attention to awakened souls, when they frame their doings to turn to him.

The call is, *Awake, arise from the dead*—repair to the Saviour. Say not, "We are unable to discern the way:" Christ will shine upon you and give you light. Say not, "We are unable to rise and walk:" He will meet you with his grace. "Arise, he calleth you."



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He will guide your steps. Stretch out to him your withered hand; he will give it strength. When the prodigal, having come to himself, felt his own wretched condition, and contemplated the rich supplies in his father's house—what did he say? Did he complain, "I cannot return?"—No: He resolved, "I will arise and go to my father." "And while he was yet a great way off, the father saw him, had compassion on him and ran to meet him.

Do you ask, "What can the dead do toward their own resurrection?—To what purpose are the prayers and endeavors of sinners for their own conversion?"—These are questions of a soul at ease—of a sluggard who pleads, "A little more sleep, a little more slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep." Your danger has been set before you. If you have been *wholly* inattentive, and are still unawakened, I can only tell you again, your danger is exceeding great, and greater than before. The same stupidity, which has *hindered* your attention to this warning, will, I am afraid, defeat any advice which can be given you. But if, convinced of your guilt, and sensible of your danger, you seriously inquire, what you must do, you will gladly receive the word.

Acquaint yourselves, then, with the nature of religion. Think on your ways, and compare *them with* the word of God. Read and hear this word with honest selfapplication. Avoid whatever might extinguish your present sober sentiments. Shun the occasions of, and temptations to sin. Daily implore God's quickening and sanctifying grace, and in humble dependence on this grace form your resolutions against sin, and your purposes of new obedience.

Consider your present awakening as a new call from God to turn to him and hope in his grace. To this grace you are indebted for the work begun in you. Receive it not in vain. However insufficient you are to do any thing as of yourselves, yet remember you

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are not left to yourselves. By that grace which is now striving with you, there is something which you may do. "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who worketh in you."

You see, on the one hand, how dangerous is your condition, while you continue in your sins; and on the other, how great is your encouragement to repent and seek God's mercy. If you are still unpersuaded—if neither a view of God's wrath makes you afraid, nor a view of his mercy animates your hope—if despising both the terrors of the law, and the invitations of the gospel, you go on still in your trespasses, what more shall be said?—Know, my friends, it is high time to awake out of sleep. Though you may sleep in sin, and delay your repentance, yet your judgment lingereth not, and your damnation slumbereth not; but you are bringing on yourselves swift destruction. Therefore awake, ye who sleep, and arise from the dead, for now Christ will give you light.

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# SERMON XXXVII.

## *Christian Circumspection.*

EPHESIANS v. 15, 16, 17.

*See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, because the days are evil. Wherefore be not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.*

THESE Ephesians, who were sometimes in darkness or Heathenism, had now by the preaching of the gospel become light in the Lord. The Apostle therefore exhorts them to walk as children of light—"not as fools, but as wise." To walk in wisdom is a phrase, which may be understood as comprehending the whole of religion: But here it is used more especially to express the *prudence* and *discretion*, which ought to distinguish the Christian life. It is to walk *circumspectly*. And the reason assigned is, "because the days are evil."

We will explain the duty, and then apply the argument.

I. The duty recommended is, "to walk *circumspectly*."

The original word is often rendered, *diligently*; as where Herod inquired *diligently* of the wise men, what time the star appeared; and commanded them to

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search *diligently* for the child, whom the star designated. It is composed of two words, one of which signifies the *height* or *top* of a thing; the other signifies to *go* or *walk*. The phrase then imports such a *caution* and *exactness* in our Christian conversation, as resembles that which men use, when they are walking on the top of a precipice, or the summit of a building, where a small mistep would endanger a fall, and a fall would be fatal.

This circumspection will best be illustrated by its application to particular cases.

1. Walk circumspectly that you may keep within the *line* of your *duty*.

Religion is not an extended plain, in which you may walk at large, and turn to any point without passing its limits; but it is a strait and narrow path, in which you must pursue one steady course without deviating to either side. Your course often lies in a medium between two extremes. If from this course you deviate, you step into the territory of vice. There are some virtues, which are not capable of excess. There are others which consist in a mediocrity. With reference to these the Apostle says, "Let your *moderation* be known to all men."

Be circumspect, that you may not *mistake* your duty. Prove all things; and hold fast that which is good." Form your religious sentiments, by the plain doctrines and precepts of the gospel—not by the vague opinions, or corrupt practices of the world. There are errors, which some embrace with airs of assurance, and defend with ostentation of argument. But be not deceived: "Ponder well the path of your feet, and let your ways be established."

Be watchful to retain a *sense* of virtue and rectitude. "Give earnest heed to the things which you have learned, lest by any means you let them slip."—"Having chosen the way of truth, lay God's judgments before you, and cleave to his testimonies."

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Be attentive, that you may conform to the *spirit* of God's commands.

Our Lord says, "Be wise as serpents, and harmless as doves."—"Be wise;" but with your wisdom combine "innocence." Be harmless, but not silly; inoffensive, but not unguarded—be prudent, but not crafty; cautious, but not insidious, act right yourselves, and beware of men.

The Apostle says, "Be angry and sin not." You may resent an injury, but not indulge malevolence—may take measures for defence, but not study arts of revenge.

You are cautioned, "neither to despise the chastening of the Lord, nor to faint under his rebukes." Between these extremes lies your duty in the day of affliction. Be sensible of, but not impatient under God's corrections—be prayerful, but not complaining—be humble, but not disconsolate.

It is a precept of the gospel, "Take no thought for the morrow." This, however, must be understood in a sense consistent with the precepts, which require you to do your own business, abide in your calling and provide for your household. In this mortal state, look and prepare for changes; but be not solicitous about them. In all conditions maintain a balance of mind. Be neither anxious nor careless—neither perplexed nor stupid—neither thoughtless of contingences, nor distressed with the fear of them.

"Be gentle and easy to be entreated;" yet never stoop to sinful compliances—be steady in duty, but not obstinate in trifles—hear instruction and reproof; but be well persuaded in your own minds—change your opinions and manners, when you are convinced they have been wrong; but be not children carried about with every wind of doctrine—be strict, but not superstitious—cheerful, but not vain—serious, but not morose—useful in your places, but not busy in other

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men's matters—exemplary in conversation, but not ostentatious—eminently holy, but unaffectedly humble.

That in these and similar cases you may walk by the strait line of duty, you must walk circumspectly.

2. Walk circumspectly, that you may *escape* the *snares* in your way.

"A prudent man foreseeth evil and hideth himself: The simple pass on and are punished." Your greatest security lies in watchfulness and prayer, lest you enter into temptations. If they meet you, resist them; but your first care must be to avoid them. If you rashly throw yourselves in their way and challenge them to the combat, there is little reason to hope you will come off unhurt.

Often look forward to descry your dangers: Decline them, when you can: If you cannot decline them, arm yourselves to meet them, and proceed with courage, relying on divine support. Temptations will most easily prevail, when they take you by surprise.

Attend to your particular situation and condition in life. Poverty and riches, adversity and prosperity, youth and age, a public and a private station, have their respective dangers. Consider your own state, and beware of the temptations which it brings.

Examine your infirmities, biasses and corruptions. Thus you will learn what sins and temptations most easily beset you, and prevail against you; and thus you will know, where to place your strongest guard.

Often review your past life, and reflect on former temptations, and the circumstances from which they arose. Thus experience will teach you, how to employ your future caution.

Be circumspect, that you may *detect* your enemies, when they approach you in *disguise*. They will often come with deceitful pretensions, appear in the fascinating garb of friendship and innocence, and address you by guileful flatteries and subtle insinuations. Beware, lest you be led away with the errors of the wicked. Ex-

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amine with care every suspicious suggestion, whether from within or without. Be not ignorant of the deceitfulness of the heart, the wiles of the devil, the craftiness of men, and the snares of the world, lest you be seduced from your virtuous resolution, and fall from your stedfastness.

Be vigilant, lest while you oppose one temptation, you invite another; and while you avoid one extreme, you rush into the contrary. Dangers await you on both sides: To guard on one side only, is to leave the other more defenceless.

Never neglect your duty under pretence of shunning a temptation. Where duty calls, thither you must go; apprized indeed of your dangers, but unawed by them. To decline known duty on account of foreseen temptations, is a false caution. The true caution is to collect the strength of your faith, and implore the aid of God's grace.

Circumspection is peculiarly necessary when "temptations actually surround you. David says, "I take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue; I will keep my mouth with a bridle while the wicked is before me."

3. Walk circumspectly that you may wisely *comport* with the *aspects* of Providence.

The beauty of religion, yea, religion itself, greatly consists in the correspondence of your temper and behavior with your existing circumstances. In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider. In affliction be patient and humble—in poverty be contented and submissive. In straits and perplexities cast your cares on God—in affluence remember and shew kindness to the poor—in worldly success be thankful, but rejoice with trembling—in preferment check your ambition and study to be extensively useful—in every relation fulfil its appropriate obligations. Every pious affection and virtuous exercise is then most amiable in itself, most acceptable to God, most

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comfortable to ourselves and most profitable to men, when it is best adapted to our relations and circumstances.

4. Be circumspect, that you may do *every* duty in its *time* and *place*.

You are to attend on the daily worship of God in your families and closets, and you are also to pursue the business of your respective vocations. Here call in the direction of wisdom, that you may not give to the former that time which belongs to the latter; nor that application to the latter which would divert you from, or unfit you for the former. Let each have its due share of your time and attention.

Be kind and beneficent to the poor; but take heed to yourselves, that ye do not your alms to be seen of men, that you feed not their vices, when you should relieve their necessities, and that you give not in ostentatious charity, what you owe to the wants of your families or the demands of your creditors. And on the other hand, make not the calls of domestic exigence, or the obligations of social justice a mere *pretext* to excuse yourselves from doing good, when the occasion of others requires, and your own ability permits.

You are to regard principally the interest of your souls; but you may not neglect the care of your bodies. Here you must be circumspect, lest you suffer your temporal concerns to exclude those of eternity; or lest, under pretence of engagedness in religion, you forget the obligations of industry, justice and beneficence.

You are to attend on the instituted ordinances of the gospel; but beware lest you substitute these for that solid and substantial holiness, which these were intended to promote.

You must observe the outward forms of religion with godly sincerity; but never plead the possible want of sincerity as a reason for neglecting the forms.

Prudence will direct you to avoid, when you innocently can avoid, the temporal inconveniences attend-



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ing a profession of religion. "When they persecute you in this city flee to another." But in your caution to escape the evils of the world, you must not decline a profession, deny the faith and put away a good conscience. "Whosoever is ashamed of Christ in an evil generation, of him will Christ be ashamed in the presence of his Father." This seems to be the case especially intended in the text. As the times were dangerous, Christians were to walk circumspectly, that they might preserve their integrity, and yet avoid the evils which threatened them. If both could not be done, they must maintain their integrity at all hazards.

5. Walk circumspectly, that your *good* may not be *evil spoken of.*

On no consideration may you do evil or neglect duty: But in the *manner* of performing your duty, you may often, with great advantage, accommodate yourselves to the weaknesses, humors and inclinations of others. Innocent liberties you must *avoid*, when your use of them would be perverted to the dishonor of religion and the prejudice of your own character. In things indifferent be not rigid and uncomplying, but by an easy condescension please all men for their good. Thus the Apostle "was made all things to all men, that he might by all means save some.

The behavior of Christians is watched, by *some*, that they may imitate it; by more, that they may vilify it. So act in all things, that you may encourage the virtuous, silence the captious, and cut off occasion from them who desire occasion to reproach your profession and the gospel which you profess. "Walk in wisdom toward them who are without. And let your speech be always with grace seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man."

I have illustrated the circumspect behavior which the Apostle recommends. The argument by which he urges it, is this:

II. "The days are evil."

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The argument was not peculiar to those early times. It is pertinent at all times.

The Christian, while he dwells on earth, may say, "The days are evil," because he finds in himself much disorder and corruption. In the world of glory watchfulness will be superseded by perfection. Here he must walk circumspectly, that he may not be drawn away by fleshly lusts and worldly affections—may keep under his body and bring it into subjection—may strengthen the principles of holiness in his soul, and confirm his heavenly hopes.

The days are evil, as he is exposed to various afflictions. He must walk circumspectly, that he may comport with the aspects of providence, accommodate himself to all changes of condition, learn obedience and resignation to God by the things which he suffers, and by faith and patience obtain the promises.

The days are evil, for there are many adversaries. Evil spirits, worldly objects, wicked examples and fleshly inclinations oppose his progress. He must walk circumspectly, that he may foresee and avoid temptations, guard against a surprise, prevent the undue influence of sensible objects, and be blameless and harmless in the midst of a perverse nation.

The days are evil, as iniquity abounds. He must walk circumspectly, that he may keep himself unspotted from the world, may secure his good profession from contempt, may stop the progress of vice and error, and support the languishing cause of truth and righteousness.

Let us apply to ourselves these considerations; and as we profess to be Christians—to be children of light and of the day, let us not walk as those who are in darkness, and know not at what they stumble; but let us walk wisely and circumspectly, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

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# SERMON XXXVIII.

## *Redemption of Time.*

EPHESIANS v. 16.

*——Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.*

THE *redemption* of time, together with the *reason* for it, "the days are evil," will be the subject of our present meditations.

I. We will consider what it is to *redeem* the time.

To *redeem* is to reclaim by price, or recover by labor that which has been lost or alienated; or to preserve by prudence that which is in danger. It is a metaphor taken from the practice of merchants, who observe the favorable seasons of buying and selling, of making profits and repairing losses, who keep regular accounts of their expenses and gains, and often inspect their affairs, to know whether their interest is in progress or decline.

It is here supposed that time is precious. That we may redeem it, we must make a just estimate of its value.

It is precious, because we have much business on our hands—business which relates, not to our bodies only, but to our souls—not merely to this life, but to the whole duration of our existence.

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It is precious, because it is short and uncertain; and our work must be done soon, or it never can be done at all.

It is precious, because part, and, with many, the greater part of it is gone already. What remains is increased in value, as it is contracted in length. We had none to waste at first; we have need to be frugal now.

To redeem time is to regain what is lost, and to save what is left.

First: We must regain the time which is lost.

Time passed, indeed, cannot be recalled. Each moment, which flies off, is gone forever, and will return no more. Like the wind, it passeth away and cometh not again. But we do the best we can toward the recovery of lost time, when we reflect with sorrow on follies past, and resolve to be wise in future. Though we cannot revoke the past guilty scenes, yet we may repent that we have lived as we have done; and be careful now to live as we should have done. We shall not amend our lives, until we repent of past sins; nor improve our future time well, until we are humbled, that the past has been spent so ill.

Sit down then, and take a serious review of life. Inquire how it has been employed—what attention you have paid to the great end of your existence—what good you have done for others, or gained for yourselves—what proficiency you have made in knowledge and holiness—what hope you have acquired, and on what ground it rests.

Upon strict inquiry, many, I am afraid, will find, they have done little or nothing to the purpose, and their work is all to be done, when much of the day is spent. And all, no doubt, may confess, that their progress has not been answerable to the time they have enjoyed. Let the time past suffice to have been wasted in negligence and folly. Henceforth "walk circumspectly, redeeming the time."

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Secondly: This phrase imports prudence to save, and diligence to improve the time that remains.

In vain you pretend to lament your past folly, unless you apply your hearts to wisdom. "Godly sorrow will work in you carefulness."

1. Enter on your work *speedily*. Do you ask, what is your work? It is time you knew. Consult God's word; that will tell you. The religion of a sinner must begin in repentance toward God, and faith toward Jesus Christ; and it must be perfected in the works of faith and the fruits of repentance. "Think then on your ways, turn your feet into God's testimonies; make haste and delay not to keep his commandments." No longer content yourselves with distant purposes. While you procrastinate, instead of redeeming the time you have lost, you are losing what is left. How can you say, You repent, that you have trifled so long, if you continue to trifle still? How can you say, You wish to recal your time, that you may improve it better, if still you waste your time as before? If you think of regaining lost time, make immediate application to your work; for while you delay, time passes off; and the more you lose, the more is to be redeemed, and the smaller your stock on hand.

2. Attend to your work with *diligence*.

A sense of past slothfulness must excite you to severer industry. The traveller, who lingers in the morning, must proceed with quicker pace to reach the intended stage by night. The Redeemer, who was always diligent in God's work, was more active, as his time grew shorter. "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: The night cometh, when no man can work."

"What your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work in the grave." There are duties which relate both to this, and to the future world. These duties, considered in relation to their different objects, differ in importance; but both claim

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attention. Diligence in your secular duties is important, as a security against temptations, as conducive to your comfort and usefulness, and as included in the obligations to justice and charity. It therefore, in its connexion and influence, is a substantial part of religion. Diligence in the work of your souls is the principal thing; for your future salvation is so much superior to all other interests, that it is called, *The one thing needful.* However diligent you are in your secular calling, if, in the mean time, you neglect your salvation, you only trifle; for "what will you be profited, if you gain the whole world, and lose your soul?"

Be not only fervent, but *steady* in your work. A wavering zeal makes no progress. "The doubleminded man is unstable in all his ways: Let not that man think, that he shall obtain any thing of the Lord."

Be *fruitful* in every good work. Aspire to eminence in holiness. "Forgetting the things which are behind, reach forward to the things which are before, and press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling."

3. *Guard* against the things, which *rob* you of your time.

An *indolent* habit is inconsistent with laudable actions. It creates imaginary, and magnifies real difficulties and dangers. It raises a lion or a hedge of thorns in its way. It enervates the powers of the body, and stupifies the energy of the mind.

A *versatile* humor is active, but wants patience. It forms great designs with confidence, enters upon them with ardor and leaves them unmatured. It flies from object to object with too much rapidity to appropriate or retain any. Novelty only has charms; familiarity begets indifference. Time is lost, because nothing is prosecuted to effect.

An excessive *fondness* for *company* and *amusement*, is the cause of much waste of time. Diversions may be innocent; but then, they must be well chosen,

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wisely timed, and moderately used. They must be well chosen—such as will not exhaust, but repair the strength, refresh the spirits and dispose the mind for the return of duty. They must be wisely timed; for however innocent in their nature, they become sinful, when they occupy the hours which ought to be employed in the exercises of devotion, or in the labors of a secular profession. They must be moderately used; for, sought too frequently, or indulged too freely, they entrench on duty, and beget a habit of trifling.

How many are there, who transgress these rules? They know not how to be confined to their proper employment. They yield to every little avocation, and obey the call of every son of pleasure. Their vacant hours they give to amusement, and make no reservation for the culture of the mind, or the devotion of the closet and family. If you would redeem your time, restrain your love of pleasure.

Beware of *presumption*. "Boast not of tomorrow," Only the present time is yours. Tomorrow does not yet exist. When it comes, it may not find you here. If you should see it, yet you cannot retain it. It will be as transient as today.

4. Do every work *in its season*.

"There is a time for every purpose; and a wise man's heart discerneth time and judgment." Attend with discretion to the calls of duty, and you will save much time and prevent much loss. It is so in your worldly business: Make a good arrangement of its parts, and take up each part in its order, and you will execute the whole with facility and success; while your improvident neighbor, who leaves all his matters in confusion, and takes hold of his business as it happens, and usually at the wrong end, is always embarrassed with cares, straitened for time, and disappointed in the result.

This attention to seasons is no less necessary in the work of your salvation.

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*Youth* is the most promising season. Then the work is most easy, and attended with fewest obstructions; and then there is the fairest prospect of divine concurrence.

If that season is past with you, take the *present*; for the future is uncertain, and the difficulty of your work and the indisposition to attempt it will increase by delay.

The time of *health* is more favorable than a time of sickness; for you are now more capable of intense thought and persevering application, and better able to prove your sincerity.

There are some *tender* seasons, when the conscience is awakened, serious sentiments impressed and good resolutions excited. Improve *these* seasons. Resist not, but comply with the encouraging motions of the Spirit, lest he retire, and no more return.

There are seasons friendly to *particular* duties. For your daily devotions, choose the hours, when your minds can be the most free from the occupations of the world, that you may attend on God without distraction. If you would advise or reprove a friend, take a time, when you can speak to him in private—when you feel your own minds affectionate, and think his to be calm and tender—when you can address him inoffensively, and he may hear you dispationately. In doing works of charity, observe opportunities. There are times, when you can do something for your neighbor without any inconvenience to yourselves, and with sensible benefit to him; you may yield him much service with small expense, and do him lasting good in a short time. By thus attending to the seasons of duty, you may fill up your time fast, and live long in a little while.

5. Wisely *divide* your time among your *various duties*.

Lawful things will become criminal in you, if they occupy your time so far, as to exclude other things of



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greater importance. The duties of religion are consistent with each other, and may be made to harmonize in practice. If they interfere, it is because you throw them into confusion, and your time into disorder. Distribute your seasons properly, and arrange your works prudently; then you will find means for all incumbent acts of beneficence and righteousness; liberty for the daily exercises of piety and devotion; leisure for family instructions and counsels, and time sufficient for the prosecution of your secular labors.

We have seen how we are to redeem the time.

II. We will briefly attend to the argument subjoined, "The days are evil."

We shall not dwell long on this argument; for it has been in part inticipated under the preceding branch of our subject.

Our days may be called evil in a *moral* sense, as we have done much evil, and there is evil still within us. Some are under the full power of sin. These have not only the work of religion to begin, but much sin to repent of, many vicious habits to eradicate, many fleshly lusts to mortify, the work of their past lives to *undo*, and a new work to accomplish. They have hitherto been travelling in a wrong path, and their guilty way they must tread back by the careful steps of repentance. We have all much work on our hands. If we have exercised repentance unto life, yet our work is not finished. There are corruptions to conflict with, temptations to watch against, daily duties to perform and continual improvements to make. We must cleanse ourselves from all pollutions, go on to perfection and give diligence to the full assurance of hope. Our work is important; upon our fidelity in it depends our comfort here, and our happiness hereafter. Now is the season to provide for eternity. There is no work in the grave. We have no time to spare.

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Our days may be called evil, as they are *few*. We may say with the patriarch, "Few and evil have been the years of our pilgrimage." Since our work is great and our time is short, we have need to redeem the time by a diligent application of it to the work before us. A considerable proportion of our time is gone already: If this has been wasted, how frugally should we use what remains?

Some have arrived to that time of life, which is eminently called *an evil day*. It concerns them to review their days, prove their works, examine their hearts and know the condition of their souls. If they have been slothful in business, let them now become fervent in spirit, serving the Lord. If they have slept in their guilt it is high time to awake out of sleep; for their time is far spent.

The days are evil, as *iniquity abounds*. Many temptations to a waste of time, will meet us from the enticements and examples of the wicked, from the suggestions of evil spirits, and from the influence of worldly cares. Let us walk circumspectly redeeming the time. While the world around lies dead in sin, saints too easily lose their zeal. When the foolish virgins slept, the wise slumbered with them. Let us not sleep as do others, but watch and be sober.

The days are evil, as this is a state of *mortality*. We are subject to affliction and exposed to death. Our fellow mortals are dropping around us; and we are soon to fall. Our last day is at hand; we are not sure of another. What time may be allowed us, let us wisely improve, in examining our hearts, correcting our errors, repenting of our sins, amending our lives, cultivating religion in ourselves, promoting it among others, and seeking the mercy of God for our own and the common salvation. Thus, when the time of our departure is come, we may adopt the language of the Apostle; "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness."

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# SERMON XXXIX.

## *Temperance.*

EPHESIANS v. 18.

*And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess.*

DRUNKENNESS, though in general disallowed among the Heathens, was admitted in their Bacchanalia, as an expression of gratitude to the God, who gave them wine. This Pagan rite the Apostle seems to have in his mind, when he says to the *Ephesians*, newly converted to the religion of Christ, "Be not ye drunk with wine, wherein is excess," dissoluteness and luxury, "but be filled with the Spirit." *Instead* of those wild and brutal indulgencies, by which you once pretended to express your joy, seek the sober and rational pleasures, which are communicated by the Holy Spirit.

The opposition here made between being filled *with wine*, and filled with *the Spirit*, shews that drunkenness is inconsistent with the pure religion taught by the gospel.

We will, first, consider the nature and extent of this vice; and then represent the guilt and danger which attend it.

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I. We will consider the nature and extent of the sin, which the Apostle calls *drunkenness*.

"Be not *drunk* with wine."

The Apostle does not mean to debar Christians from *all* use of wine and other spiritous drinks; for "every creature is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving." He advises Timothy to "use a little wine for his stomach's sake." God causes the earth to bring forth wine, which rejoices, as well as bread, which strengthens the heart of man. It is not a life of austerity and mortification, but a life of rational sobriety, which the gospel enjoins. We are not to emaciate the body, and extinguish the glow of health by an abstinence from innocent delights; but to keep under the body and bring it into subjection, by an abstinence from fleshly lusts.

"Take heed to yourselves, says our Lord, "lest at at any time your hearts be *overcharged* with *surfeiting* and *drunkenness*, and the cares of this world." The use of meat and drink is to support and comfort the body. Whatever is more than these, may be called *excess*.

Of intemperance, as of other vices, there are various degrees. The highest degree is such an indulgence as suspends the exercise of the mental and bodily powers. It is this idea, which is usually attached to the word *drunkenness*. And some who are wholly under the dominion of a sordid appetite, may perhaps think themselves temperate, because they seldom or never run to this gross excess. But remember; as you may be guilty of murder without taking away your neighbor's life, and of injustice without burning his house—so you may be guilty of intemperance without transforming yourself into a beast.

If by the indulgence of your appetite, you unfit your body for the service of the mind, or your mind for the service of God—so waste your substance, as to defraud your family of a maintenance, or your cred-

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itors of their dues—become enslaved to a sensual habit, and fascinated to dissolute company—are diverted from the duties of religion, or the business of your worldly calling—Awaken criminal desires and excite *guilty* passions—stupify your conscience, extinguish the sentiments of honor and banish the thoughts of futurity; you are chargeable with a criminal excess. Though the world, perhaps, will not stigmatize you as a drunkard, yet you are not far from that odious character. They who serve divers lusts and pleasures—*they* who are given to appetite—they who are mighty to *drink* wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink—they who tarry long at the wine, and go to seek mixed wine, they who rise up early that they may follow strong drink, and continue until night, till wine inflame them—in a word, they who make provision for the *flesh* to fulfil the lusts thereof, fall under the condemnation of scripture, as well as the atrocious drunkard. I proceed,

II. To represent the guilt and danger which attend the vice under consideration.

1. This is an ungrateful abuse to God's bounty.

God gives us all things richly to enjoy, and fills *our* hearts with food and gladness. He not only allows us necessary supplies, but indulges to us a thousand comforts. A rich variety of creatures he has put *into* our hands, some for our support, others for our delight, And shall we abuse to his dishonor the fruits of his beneficence, which are given to strengthen our faculties gladden our hearts and awaken our gratitude?

2. This vice divests the man of his native dignity, and sinks him, below the brutal herds.

"Wine takes away the heart"—the understanding, which constitutes the man. It is only reason and speech, which raise man above the animal tribes. While these powers are suspended, what is he better than they? Man, brutalized by intemperance, is *really* more despicable, than the *native* brute. The latter

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obeys; the former contradicts the nature which God has given him. The one appears in his proper form; the other assumes a monstrous figure. His motions are wild his visage distorted, his conversation silly, his manners ridiculous. Could the drunkard in a sober hour have a view of himself, as he appears under the power of intoxication, and be persuaded, that this uncouth and antic figure is really *himself*, he would, unless shame is extinguished, blush to be seen. He would retire to obscurity, conscious of his fall from manhood.

3. This vice is injurious to the body, as well as mind.

It benumbs the senses, enervates the limbs, palls the appetite, breeds diseases, creates dangers and hastens death. "Who hath woe? Who hath sorrow? Who hath contentions? Who hath babbling? Who hath wounds without cause? Who hath redness of eyes? They that tarry long at the wine; that go to seek mixed wine."

3. This consumes men's substance.

When we see one given to intemperance, we at once predict his poverty, and we trust him with caution. "The drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty, and be clothed with rags."

We think the man unhappy whose substance is destroyed by fire. More wretched is he, whose estate is consumed by his lust. If this man has any sensibility left, how must his conscience reproach him? How must the cries of a helpless family pierce him? How must the demands of his disappointed creditors confound him? With what shame must he reflect on the infamous exchange which he has made of a decent fortune for a transient pleasure? How must it gall him to see strangers in possession of the inheritance which he received from his father's industry, and has alienated by his own folly? How must it mortify him to think that he is changed from a man of reputable business, to a

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miserable, reeling drunkard? And that they who once approached him with respect, now point at him with the finger of contempt?

But this is not the worst of his case; for,

5. He has wasted his conscience as well as his substance.

Dead to the feelings of honor, the obligations of virtue, and the apprehensions of futurity, he proceeds in his guilty course, without fear or restraint.

Ye, who have addicted yourselves to pleasure and gaming, to dissolute company, and the free use of strong drink, inquire, whether you cannot perceive some unhappy effects of your indulgence. Is not the love of these sensual objects growing upon you, and gaining a more absolute dominion over you? Are you not more indifferent about the concerns of *immortality*, than you were formerly?—Is not your conscience more unfeeling to guilt, and less apt to rebuke your unworthy conduct?—Are you not more negligent in attending the duties of the closet, the family and the sanctuary?—Are you not more disposed to make *light* of religion, to cavil at the scriptures and to despise reproof?—Can you not more easily flatter yourselves with safety in a way of sin, and with a hope that the threatenings contained in the Bible will never be executed? Can you not remember the time, *when you* would have shuddered to hear those licentious opinions, which now you listen to with pleasure; and to think of such stupidity of soul, as you now really feel?—Is this a just description of your state? Then inquire from what cause this increasing irreligion and impiety have proceeded. You need not be long in doubt. Your own experience, if you consult it, will confirm the truth of the scripture, which describes the sensual, as hating instruction, despising reproof, scoffing at religion, and flattering themselves, that they shall have peace, though they add drunkenness to thirst.

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6. Intemperance generates other vices—impure lustings, angry passions, profane language, insolent manners, obstinacy of heart and contempt of reproof. "Look not upon the wine," says Solomon, "when it is red, when it giveth its color in the cup; for thine eyes shall behold a strange woman, and thine heart shall utter perverse things; yea, thou shalt be as he that lieth down in the midst of the sea, or he that lieth upon the top of a mast. They have stricken me, thou shalt say, and I was not sick; they have beaten me, and I felt it not. When shall I awake? I will seek it yet again."

7. Intemperance has most lamentable effects on families.

It subverts order and government. How shall a man command his children and his household, when he has not reason and virtue enough to command himself? How shall he govern their actions, when he is enslaved to his own passions? If sometimes, in a serious frame, he inculcates on them the duties of religion, his shocking example defeats his good exhortations. The parent, who would be regarded in his station, must make his actions and instructions agree.

The government, which an intemperate man exercises, is too passionate and wanton, too unsteady and inconsistent to be revered. Government, to be efficacious, must be calm and rational.

What devotion can there be in a family, whose head is given to intemperance? He is often absent at the hours of prayer. If he is present, he is incapable of leading in the solemnity. His sensual habit renders him indifferent, and, by degrees, averse to the sacred exercise. You may doubtless recollect instances of the discontinuance of family worship from this unhappy cause. Some who have early begun, and for a time observed this important duty, falling into licentious connexions, have intermitted, and, at last, laid it aside.

This vice destroys domestic peace and tranquillity. The man addicted to it, grows factious, peevish and



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fretful. He falls out with his best friends, hastily condemns their innocent, and even their most prudent behavior, is deaf to reason, spurns restraint and resents advice. He considers as enemies those who seek his welfare, and mistakes their kind offices as tokens of hatred.

He makes all around him unhappy, and those the most so, who stand in the nearest relation. When he is absent, how anxious are they, lest he fall into temptation and a snare? What pain they feel, when he foams out his own shame? How they wish to conceal from the world the infamy which he betrays, and at which he cannot blush? When he returns from abroad, how fearful are they, lest he come charged with passion to be let out on his household?

This sin brings family distress. It begets negligence, interrupts business, slackens industry, obstructs education, and spreads discouragement and langour. While the intemperate householder is indulging himself abroad, his family at home are miserable for want of the comforts, which his labor should provide, and his frugality should preserve; and his children are running wild for want of parental wisdom and virtue to guide and restrain them.

8. The scripture abounds in the most solemn warnings against this sin.

"Woe to them," says the prophet, "who are mighty to drink wine—the harp and the viol, the tabret and the pipe are in their feasts; but they regard not the work of the Lord, nor consider the operation of his hands." Our Savior cautions us, that "we be not at any time overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness, lest the day of the Lord come upon us unawares." St. Paul says to the Romans, "Let us walk honestly as in the day, not in rioting and drunkenness, but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ." He says to the Thessalonians, "Ye are children of light and of the day; we are not of the night nor of darkness; therefore let us

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not sleep as do others, but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep, sleep in the night; and they that be drunken, are drunken in the night; but let us who are of the day, be sober." "The time past of our life," says St. Peter, "may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in excess of wine, revellings, banquettings and abominable idolitries—I beseech you, that ye abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul."

They, who are "drunk with wine," cannot "be filled with the Spirit." Drunkenness and revellings are works of the flesh; these are contrary to the Spirit, whose fruits are moderation and temperance. They who "walk in the Spirit," will "not fulfil the lusts of the flesh." And they who "walk in ungodly lusts, being sensual, have not the Spirit."

This sin is of a hardening nature, and recovery from it peculiarly doubtful, because it is more opposite, than most others, to that work of the Spirit, by which sinners are awakened to conviction, and renewed to repentance. And it is an observable, but melancholy truth, that few, once enslaved to it, return to a life of sobriety. If now and then, awakened to a sense of danger, they resolve to escape from the snare, they are again entangled therein and overcome.

Finally: Consider, that this sin must be renounced, or the end of it will be death. "Nothing can enter into heaven, that defiles or works abomination." "Be not deceived—drunkards shall not inherit the kingdom of God." The end of all things is at hand; be sober, watch unto prayer, and let your moderation be known unto all men." "Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord. when he cometh shall find watching. But if the evil servant shall say in his heart, My Lord delayeth his coming, and shall begin to eat and drink with the drunken, his Lord shall come, when he looketh not for him, and shall cut him asunder and appoint him his portion with hypocrites."

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I have stated the nature and represented the danger of intemperance. Hear and take warning.

Abstain from the appearance of evil; avoid the company of the dissolute; be on your guard in times and places of temptation; resist the beginnings, and shun the occasions of so dangerous a vice. Be diligent in the duties of your calling, and daily commit yourselves to divine protection.

Let the professors of religion decline those liberties which might dishonor their character, wound religion, or embolden the licentious.

To conclude: Think not that drunkenness is the only sin that endangers mens souls: Know that no unrighteous man, in whatever respect he is such, can inherit the kingdom of God.

When you look on a drunkard, you view *him with* a kind of horror. You wonder that he can pursue, without remorse, a course so destructive of health, substance and character, and so fatal to his soul; and that neither the warnings of others, nor his own experience, nor the admonitions of scripture can have any effect to make him wise. But turn a thought on yourself. Is there no iniquity in you? Consider, that every allowed and customary sin excludes from heaven. Perhaps you are not intemperate: But if you are unjust, envious, malicious, uncharitable, *impatient*, discontented, or in any respect vicious, you are as really unfit for heaven, as the drunkard. And you can no more be saved without repentance, than he. And repentance in you must be the same thing as in him. It must be a change of heart from the love of sin to the love of righteousness. It must be a renovation in the spirit of the mind, a renouncing of the old man, and an assuming of the new.

Think not yourself unconcerned in a discourse of this kind, because you never was a drunkard; but remember, that the same gospel, which excludes the

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drunkard, excludes every habitual sinner from the kingdom of heaven. While you wish your intemperate neighbor would apply this discourse, apply it yourself. While you wish he would amend his ways, amend your own. Keep yourself from your iniquity, and lay aside the sin which easily besets you. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

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# SERMON XL.

## *Believers to be filled with the Spirit.*

EPHESIANS v. 18.

*——Be filled with the Spirit.*

INTEMPERANCE, though generally condemned among the Heathens, was allowed in some of their festival solemnities. Lest the new converts in Ephesus should retain a usage, which had been deemed a part of religion, the Apostle gives them this caution, "Be not drunk with wine wherein is excess."—In opposition to being filled with wine, he exhorts them to be "filled with the Spirit."

We will inquire,

What is intended by the *Spirit*. What is implied in being *filled* with the Spirit. And,

By what *means* we may obtain this privilege.

I. What is intended by the *Spirit*, is our first inquiry.

The word *Spirit* is in scripture used in various senses—for a human soul—an angel—the Deity. But when it is used indefinitely, as in the text, we are in most instances to understand by it that divine person who, by way of eminence, is called the *Holy Spirit*, and who is represented as dwelling in the hearts of good

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men, to excite in them pure affections and assist them in religious duties.

"The Lord our God is one Lord." And we are to admit no conceptions of him inconsistent with his unity. But the scripture speaks of a threefold distinction in the godhead, under the names of *Father*, *Son* and *Spirit*, to each of which it ascribes divine and personal properties. We may therefore be allowed to call them *divine persons*, only taking care that we entertain no ideas repugnant to the unity and perfection of the Godhead.

What this distinction is, we cannot comprehend. It is sufficient that, on this inscrutable subject, we retain the language of holy writ, and speak, not in the words which man's wisdom has invented, but in the words which the Holy Ghost has taught.

The gospel represents each of these divine persons as sustaining a distinct part in the economy of our salvation. "We have access to God, through Christ, by the Spirit." The plan of man's redemption originated with the Father, who gave his only begotten Son, that we might live through him. The execution of this plan is committed to the Son, who, being manifested in the flesh, gave himself up to suffer death for our sins, and afterward arose from the dead and ascended into heaven, where he makes intercession for us: And, when the time for the continuance of the human succession shall be closed, he will appear to administer the grand affairs of the final judgment. The Holy Spirit is sent forth from the Father to apply the redemption which Christ has purchased. For this end he convinces men of sin, renews them to repentance, and dwells with the humble, disposing and assisting them to the duties of the Christian life.

The Son of God is now on the right hand of the majesty in heaven; there he intercedes for us, receives and offers our prayers and obtains for us the remis-

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sion of our sins, in virtue of his sacrifice once offered on the cross.

The Spirit dwells with believers to lead them into truth, help their infirmities, strengthen their good resolutions, and preserve them unto salvation.

The Son is our high priest appearing for us in the temple of God and offering incense with our prayers. The Spirit is our comforter and helper to work in us according to God's good pleasure.

As Christians are called "the temples of the Holy Ghost," who is said to "dwell in them;" so when they are exhorted to be "filled with the Spirit," that divine Spirit, which in true believers is the principle of holiness, strength and comfort, must doubtless be intended.

God, in regard of his essential and providential presence is "above all, through all and in us all."—"He besets us before and behind; he possesses our reins." Something therefore very different from *this* must be intended, when we are exhorted to be "filled with the Spirit." The phrase must respect some moral and holy influence.

The manner in which the Spirit operates on the human mind, we can no more explain, than we can explain the operations of nature in the production of vegtable fruits, or in the formation of animal bodies. *But* as observation teaches us the latter, so revelation assures us of the former. If we believe that God is a perfect being, we must believe which he can influence the souls which he has made, in a manner agreeable to the natures which he has given them.

The Spirit was granted to the Apostles in an extraordinary measure: They were sent forth to preach a religion which contained many wonderful doctrines—a religion which was in many respects opposite to the common opinions and prejudices of Jews and Heathens—a religion which crossed the corrupt humors of men—a religion destitute of secular support, and likely to

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be persecuted by the powers of the world. This religion they were to propagate among the nations of the earth, whose languages were as diverse as their sentiments. In order to a successful execution of this arduous commission, it was necessary, that they should be inspired with the knowledge of divine mysteries; that they should be secured from capital mistakes in communicating their heavenly doctrines; that they should be endued with the gift of tongues, so as to preach intelligibly to all men; that they should be furnished with a power to work miracles in conformation of the religion which they preached; and that they should be divinely supported under all the trials which attended their work. Accordingly we find, that they were filled with miraculous gifts and powers; and that, in consequence of their supernatural endowments, they propagated the gospel with surprising success. And many expressions concerning the bestowment of the Spirit, have special reference to these miraculous gifts.

These extraordinary operations were to continue only for a season, until the Christian church was established, and the written revelation was completed. The Apostle says, "Whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge," supernaturally communicated, "it shall vanish away."

Even in the apostolic age, it was not every preacher, who received his knowledge by inspiration. Timothy is directed to hold fast the form of sound words, which he had heard from the Apostles, and to give attendance to reading, that, he might rightly understand, and wisely divide the word of truth. The gospel itself has taught us, that no additional revelations are to be made; and that whosoever shall presume to preach another gospel, or add to this which we have received, shall bring on himself the curses written in it.

But though miraculous gifts have ceased, still there is an internal influence of the Spirit common to this



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and all ages of the Christian church. Our Saviour promises his disciples the Spirit to abide with them for ever. He represents the Father as giving the Spirit to every one who asks it. And it is the character of all true Christians, that they have the Spirit, are led by it and walk in it. Such expressions must intend some heavenly influence very different from immediate inspiration and miraculous gifts. A man might have these gifts of the Spirit, and yet be a stranger to its renewing influence—might prophesy, speak with tongues, abound in knowledge, and by faith remove mountains, and yet be nothing in religious estimation. Among the workers of iniquity, whom Christ, at the last day, will reject, many will plead, that in his name they have cast out devils and done other wonderful works. When therefore the Apostle exhorts believers to be filled with the Spirit, in opposition to being filled with wine, he must mean, that they should seek that holy influence, which forms the mind to a meetness for the kingdom of heaven.

I would add; by the Spirit we may understand those *holy tempers* which are called "the fruits of the Spirit," in opposition to "the works of the flesh." The latter are "uncleanness, hatred, variance, wrath, strife, drunkenness, revellings and such like." The former are "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, meekness, fidelity and temperance." Christians are directed to abound in love, hope and every good work—to be filled with the fruits of righteousness and with the knowledge of God's will—to grow in grace, and build themselves up on their most holy faith, adding to it virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and charity, till all these things abound in them. As these are the fruits of the Spirit, so to be filled with them is to be filled with the Spirit. And these are principally intended by the Spirit in our text. We proceed to shew,

II. What is implied in being *filled* with the Spirit.

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1. This supposes, what the gospel uniformly teaches, our *dependence* on the grace of God in the religious life. Though we are moral and intelligent beings, yet such is the depravity of our nature, that "we are not sufficient of ourselves to think any thing, as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God." Paul confesses, "By the grace of God I am what I am—I labored abundantly, yet not I, but the grace of God which is with me."

2. The expression implies, that there is a *supply* of the Spirit for them who seek it. "It hath pleased the Father, that in Christ all fulness should dwell, and of his fulness we may all receive grace for grace—grace sufficient for us—grace which is made perfect in our weakness.

3. It farther imports an *actual participation* of such measures of grace as are competent to the exigencies of the Christian life.

It is the office of the Spirit, to transform us by the renewing of the mind—to carry on the work of sanctification in us—to secure us against temptations—to preserve us from apostasy—to comfort us in afflictions—to assist us in prayer—to seal us unto the day of redemption—to witness with our Spirits that we are the children of God. When we are filled with the Spirit, we enjoy his influences in these various respects.

We are to ask *large* communications of grace. Among real Christians there are different degrees of holiness, constancy, zeal and hope. Some under the same means make greater attainments; and some with the same holy attainments have greater comforts than others. All should seek such a fulness of the Spirit, as to rise more and more above their infirmities, imperfections and fears, and to abound more and more in purity, peace and joy.

This fulness implies a *steady* enjoyment of the Spirit. As we are always dependent on the influence of providence for the support and comfort of the natural life,

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so we are always dependent on the influence of grace for the preservation of the religious life, and for those hopes and joys which spring from it. The Apostle says, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me; and the life which I live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God." We should not content ourselves with occasional good frames, but desire grace, that we may walk worthy of the Lord to *all* pleasing, and be fruitful in *every* good work.

The expression farther implies grace to help *in time of need*. The christian in his course of probation experiences a variety of trials—he passes through prosperity and adversity—he meets with temptations from without, and oppositions from within. He is sometimes in darkness and fear, and sometimes in *light* and joy. In this variety of circumstances, he needs grace to help: It concerns him therefore to *keep near to God*, and to maintain daily intercourse with *him*, that he may receive grace suitable to his condition and adequate to his wants.

This fulness imports *growth* in holiness. As the Spirit is given to carry on the work of sanctification in the soul, so one who is filled with it will be full of goodness—full of every virtuous temper and work. It is vain to pretend, that we have the presence of the Spirit, further than we bring forth his holy fruits.

4. I would observe; this fulness of the Spirit is opposed to *excess*—to all irregularity, wildness and extravagance, as well as to gross palpable vice.—The divine operations on the minds of Christians are calm and rational, tending not to confusion, but to peace.

As God has given us a complete revelation, it cannot, in the present day, be a work of the Spirit to communicate new revelations, but to direct us in the use of that which we have. Nothing, therefore, is to be regarged as a dictate of the Spirit, which contradicts, or goes beyond that which is written. By this we must

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try every Spirit, whether it be of God. By this only can we distinguish the divine influence from the delusions of fancy, or the suggestions of Satan. We are not to suppose this influence to be perceptible immediately and by itself: Its correspondence with the word of truth is the evidence by which we know its divinity. In its ordinary operations it is "the Spirit of a sound mind." It disturbs not, but assists the sober exercise of reason. Paul says to the Corinthians, "The Spirits of the prophets are *subject* to the prophets." Many, in the Corinthian church, had run into great excesses in their worshipping assemblies. They either unauthorised assumed the business of preaching, or conducted it in a reprehensible manner. Several would speak at once, confounding and interrupting one another. Such as could speak in unknown tongues preferred these to plain edifying language. In the multitude of speakers, their worship was protracted to an unreasonable length. The Apostle reproves these disorders. He says, if a stranger should come into their assemblies, he would think they were mad. He instructs them, that not every private Christian, but the prophets only should speak in the church; that these should speak by course, one after another, and not more than two or three in the same meeting; that they should utter with the tongue words easy to be understood, that so all may learn and be comforted.

Some in excuse for their extravagances, would plead, that they were under an uncontrolable operation of the Spirit that, they had no command of their tongues, that their zeal boiled with a fervor which must have vent. But the apostle tells them, the Spirit never urges men to excess, or dispossesses them of the power of selfgovernment. "The Spirits of the prophets are *subject* to the prophets; for God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints."

This we should always bear in mind, that the operations of the Spirit are consonant to sound and sober

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reason; and the more one is filled with the Spirit, the farther is he removed from every irregularity of temper, excess of passion and indecency of behavior.

The good Christian feels a concern for the honor of the gospel and the salvation of his fellow sinners. But if under pretence of godly zeal, the private Christian, or the youthful convert assumes the public teacher, he wanders from his place—he runs to excess—he stretches himself beyond his line; and this irregularity is not a fruit of the Spirit, but a work of the flesh.

A true Christian desires to see greater purity in the church. But if his zeal urges him to withdraw from the church instead of laboring to reform it; this is an excess; and this operation of zeal is from the Spirit of the world—not from the Spirit of God.

The sinner under convictions has a deep sense of guilt and danger, and an ardent desire to escape eternal wrath. But if he falls into horrible, despairing apprehensions of his state, this is an excess, for the gospel sets hope before him. His convictions may be from the Spirit; but his despondency proceeds from some other cause.

The awakened sinner gives himself much to prayer; and, as far as he is influenced by the Spirit, he prays with deep humility and earnest desire, and he seeks silent retirement. Now if, instead of repairing to his closet and pouring out his heart before God in secret, he goes into the highways and fields, and utters his prayers with noisy vociferations, he is filled with pride, not with the Spirit; for in such prayers there is excess. I proceed to shew,

III. What *we* are to *do*, that we may be filled with the Spirit.

This the Apostle enjoins as matter of duty. We are required to "have grace, that we may serve God acceptably." It is usual in scripture to command as duty, the same things which are promised as a privilege; because, in order to our receiving the promise,

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there are means to be applied. God promises, "A new heart will I give you." And he also commands, "Make you a new heart." Conversion, though a gift of divine grace, is a gift bestowed in such a way as leaves occasion for the use of means.

We are not to suppose that any thing done by us *deserves* the influence of the Spirit. Whatever connexion there is between the means used by us, and the benefits bestowed upon us, it is a connexion founded in divine favor.

Nor are we to suppose, that those endeavors, which are the means of obtaining the Spirit, *originate* from ourselves. The gospel is a ministration of the Spirit. Where God sends the former, he grants the latter. And these are the spring of all the good thoughts, desires and resolutions which are found in fallen men. Hence the conversion of sinners, and the sanctification of believers, are as really owing to the sovereign grace of God, as if they were wrought immediately, without any endeavors of ours. We are to acknowledge the grace of God in such a sense as excludes personal worthiness; but not in such a sense as excludes personal obligation.

That we may be filled with the Spirit, we must be filled with the knowledge of God's will. The new man is renewed in knowledge. He is begotten by the word of truth, as well as born of the Spirit. God grants the Spirit in the hearing of faith. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

We must exercise ourselves in serious consideration; for it is by this that knowledge is reduced to practice. We must contemplate the purity and extent of God's law, compare ourselves with it, and judge ourselves by it. We must attend to the threatenings and promises of the gospel, and apply them as far as they are pertinent to our character. We must meditate on the solemn scenes of futurity, the nature and necessity of repentance, the boundless mercy of

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God, and the marvellous scheme of redemption, and thus awaken and preserve in our minds an active sense of the important things of religion.

We must abstain from all known obstructions of the Spirit.

When the apostle exhorts us to be filled with the Spirit, he warns us against sensuality and excess. When he cautions us not to grieve the Spirit, he forbids idleness, injustice, clamor and evil speaking.

We must improve with particular attention those seasons, when conscience is awakened, and serious purposes are excited.

Having set out in religion, we must hold on our way, and look to ourselves that we lose not the things which have been wrought for us.

We must continue instant in prayer. "God *will* be inquired of." "Ask and ye shall receive."

We must give ourselves up to God through Christ, with a purpose to serve him constantly; and must frequently renew our covenant with him, humbling ourselves for past transgressions, and seeking grace for new obedience. Thus we may hope for a supply of the Spirit.

We are not to imagine, that the evidence of conversion and the joy of salvation will come suddenly. We are directed "to seek for glory by a continuance in well doing, and to give diligence for the full assurance of hope to the end.

The joy which comes in a way diverse from this is not joy in the Holy Ghost, but the joy of the hypocrite. They who walk in the comforts of the Holy Ghost, are such as walk in the fear of God.

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# SERMON XLI.

## *Christian Psalmody.*

EPHESIANS v. 19.

*Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns, and spiritual songs; singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord.*

THE Heathens, in their drunken festivals to the god of wine, used to celebrate his bounty in impure and wanton songs. The Ephesians just converted from Paganism, the Apostle instructs in a more rational and excellent devotion. He teaches them to sing, not impure, but spiritual songs; to direct their devotion, not to the imaginary god of wine, but to the Lord of nature and giver of all things; to sing, not with wild and wanton airs, but with melody of the heart; and so to conduct this branch of worship, that they may not corrupt, but comfort and edify one another.

Similar to our text is the Apostle's instruction to the Colossians. "Let the peace of God rule in your hearts to which ye are called in one body, and be ye thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord."



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I. The singing of psalms is here enjoined as a sacred branch of social worship.

We are to glorify God in our bodies and in our spirits. To him we are to consecrate the use of all our powers. And there is the same reason why the musical, as any other faculty, should be employed in his service, We are wonderfully made; and the capacity of uttering a tuneful variety of sounds, is not the smallest wonder in our formation. To him by whose wisdom we are thus curiously organized, our praise should be directed. "I will sing," says David, "and *give* praise with my *glory*,." The faculty of speech, next to reason, is the glory of man.

Praise is the most excellent part of divine worship. As charity is greater than faith and hope, because in heaven these will cease, but that will never *fail*; so praise is superior to humiliation and prayer, because these belong only to the present *state*, but that is the devotion of heaven. There our sins and *temptations* will no more molest us; our souls will be purified from present corruptions; our desires will be satisfied, and our wants supplied; and all our mournful petitions will be changed into songs of joy.

That psalmody was an instituted part of worship in the Jewish church, is evident from the many devout songs and psalms composed by divine inspiration for religious uses, some of which were sung, not only by particular persons in their private worship, but also by the whole assembly of Israel.

From the days of David, when the order of divine worship was more regularly settled, than it had been before, there was a select number of singers, instructed and supported at the public expense, whose office it was to set forward and preside over this branch of worship.

In the book of Psalms, frequent exhortations to sing praises to God are addressed to all nations of the earth, as well as to the congregation of Israel. Hence

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it appears, that this was not a ceremony peculiar to the Mosaic dispensation, but an ordinance designed for universal and perpetual use. This is distinguished from ceremonial rites by special marks of superiority. "I will praise the name of God with a song, and magnify him with thanksgiving. This also shall please the Lord better than an ox or bullock, that hath horns and hoofs."

In the New Testiment we find the same evidence, that psalmody is an ordinance of Christ, as we find in the Old Testament, that it was an ordinance of Moses. When Jesus, with his train, was descending from the mount of Olives to attend the passover at Jerusalem, the whole multitude of his disciples praised God with a loud voice, saying, "Blessed be the king that cometh in the name of the Lord, Hosanna in the highest." After the celebration of the holy supper, our Lord with his disciples "sung an hymn." Paul and Silas, confined in prison, "sung praises to God at midnight." The Apostle exhorts the churches to maintain this branch of worship, and gives them instructions for the decent and edifying performance of it. This was continued in Christian assemblies after the apostolic age. The early fathers exhort those who sing in divine worship, "to make melody in their hearts, rather than with their voices." Some Heathen writers say, "It was a custom among the Christians to assemble on a certain day, and sing hymns unto Christ, as unto God."

We may add, The church in heaven is represented as worshipping God with this exercise.—"The living creatures and the elders fall down before the lamb, and sing a new song."

The several passions of the soul have each its peculiar language and give some distinguishing notes to the voice. These different notes excite in the mind the passions which they represent. There is such a connexion between sounds and passions that they become

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by turns the causes of each other. There are certain instrumental sounds, which inspire with ardor and resolution; and others which melt and dissolve. *Much* greater effects may be produced by the living sound of human voices, harmoniously combined in singing those sacred songs, which are filled with sentiments *of piety* and devotion. The power of music to transport the soul we have all experienced; and its effect is strongly expressed by the prophet, when, describing the heavenly inhabitants as singing their changes in divine worship and crying one to another, "Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty," he says, "The posts of the door moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke."—I proceed,

II. To consider the *matter* or *subject* of our *singing*. This the apostle expresses by *psalms*, *hymns* and *spiritual songs*.

By *psalms* is doubtless intended *that collection* of sacred poems, which passes under this name; and is one of the canonical books of scripture. By *hymns* may be designed other poetical compositions of scripture, as the songs of Moses, Hannah, Zechariah, Simeon and others. By *spiritual songs* may be meant those pious and devout songs, which in that age were composed by prophets and holy men in the church, *under* the immediate influence of the Spirit. That there was such a spiritual gift in the apostolic age is evident from several passages in the 14th chapter of First Epistle to the Corinthians—"I will pray with the Spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will *sing with the Spirit*, and I will sing with the understanding also." —"When ye come together, every one of you hath a *psalm*, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation.

Under the Mosaic dispensation, there were certain songs, or psalms, statedly used in the temple worship. On special occasions new songs were composed by holy men under divine influence, and de-

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livered to the chief musician to be set to music, and sung in the congregation. In the early Christian church the practice was the same. Spiritual songs composed, occasionally, were admitted among the psalms and hymns of the Old Testament.

The matter which we sing should be accommodated to the occasion of the worship. In ordinary cases we may sing any psalm suited to the general purpose of devotion. In special cases we should select those which best correspond with the aspects of Providence.

In this gospel age, our psalmody ought not to be *confined* to that small portion of scripture, which is called "the book of psalms." We may take spiritual songs from the New Testament, as well as from the Old. The matter of our psalmody must be formed agreeably to the sacred oracles; but we need not be restricted to any one part of scripture. The Apostle's direction is, "Let the *word* of CHRIST dwell in you *richly* in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in spiritual songs."

If in the days of David it was thought necessary, that on extraordinary occasions a new song should be sung, surely now we may sing some new songs on the glorious occasion of the gospel. If the temporal deliverances vouchsafed to the people of Israel, were the subject of their public praise; much more should the great salvation, purchased by the Son of God, be the subject of *ours*. And doubtless it is more proper to celebrate this in the plain language of the gospel, than in the obscure diction of prophecy. The church in heaven sing a *new* song—not only the song of Moses, but also that of the *Lamb*.

As new songs were sung in the Jewish church, so they were set to new tunes. They were first committed to the chief musician, that he might adapt to the subjects the music in which they were to be sung. There was a variety in the tunes, as well as psalms, to

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enliven the devotion of the heart. Such is our frame that a sameness of sound flattens on the ear.

III. We are directed to sing, *making melody*—to sing with the *understanding*—to *teach* and *admonish* one another with spiritual songs—to do all things *decently* and *in order*.

The use of music, in social worship, is to assist and enliven the devotion of the heart. And when the music is performed with melody of sound, exactness of time and harmony of voices, it greatly contributes to this end. But a confused and grating discord of harsh and untutored voices, instead of kindling, chills the spirit of devotion and damps the ardor of the soul.

Singing cannot be performed to edification and comfort without *skill*. "Play *skilfully*," says the psalmist. The singers in the Jewish worship "made one sound." They kept time as exactly as if their voices were all melted into one. For this purpose they were placed together in a collected body.—Upon that grand solemnity, when Solomon brought up the ark from the city of David and set it in the holy place, "the Levites, who were the singers, stood at the east end of the altar, and with them the priests sounding with trumpets; and the trumpeters and the singers were as *one* to make *one* sound.

Care was taken that the singers should be well instructed. The chief of the Levites, by David's order, "appointed *some* of their brethren to be singers." They selected such as they found most capable of that service. And these were put under skilful instructors. "The sons of Heman were, under the hands of their father, for song in the house of the Lord." And they with their brethren "were instructed in the songs of the Lord, and were all cunning." And Chenaniah the chief of the Levites "instructed in song because he was skilful."

When the Levites sang in divine worship, they were led by a principal musician, "who was over the

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song." It is said, "The master of the song," or *carriage*, "was with the singers." Some say, He *carried* or conducted the song, and gave all the singers the *time* by a motion of his hand. Hence their voices were "as one to make one sound."

We may form some conception of the solemnity with which the temple worship among the Jews was conducted, by those allusions to it, which we find in the book of the Revelation. St. John, describing the heavenly worship, says, "The four living creatures or cherubims, and the four and twenty elders, fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them golden harps; and they sung a new song." As soon as they struck the song, he says, "I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the four cherubims and the elders, saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain." No sooner had the multitude of angels joined their voices, than all nature was tuned to harmony, and creation was one universal concert, like the whole congregation of Israel joining with the priests and Levites in the songs of the temple. "Every creature in heaven, and earth, and under the earth, heard I saying, Blessing, and glory, and honor, and power be unto him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb for ever and ever."—"And the four cherubims said, AMEN.—They made a solemn pause in the music. Whereupon the four and twenty elders fell prostrate before the throne, in humble adoration. This alludes to a custom in the temple worship, of making pauses in singing. The Jewish writers say, that in each psalm were made three intermissions, during which the trumpets continued the sound; and then the people fell down and worshipped.

John represents this new song in the heavenly temple, as being several times repeated with little variety. Here is a manifest allusion to the manner of singing in the temple. When the chief singers began the song, the chosen choir, standing near them, round about the

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altar, struck in with them. And certain emphatical parts of the song were repeated. In these repetitions the assembly joined their voices. That such repetitions were usual in the temple music, is evident from the manner in which sundry psalms are composed.

It appears, that this branch of worship in the Jewish church was conducted with great order and solemnity; and the frequent allusions to it in the New Testament, shew that it is still of equal importance, and ought to be conducted, not indeed with all the same ceremonies, but with equal seriousness and devotion. This leads me to observe,

IV. That in singing we must "make melody *in our hearts to the Lord.*"

If singing is a part of religious worship, then *this*, as well as our prayers, must be directed to God.

We must sing in obedience to his command—with a sense of his presence—with hearts disposed for his service—with affections corresponding to the matter of the psalm. If the subject be a petition, confession, thanksgiving, or adoration, our hearts must harmonize with it, and beat time to it. When we make a psalm our own, and offer it to God with suitable sentiments, then we "sing with grace in our hearts to the Lord." The melody of the heart is the consent of all the powers and affections of the soul in the service of God.

We must sing with a spirit of benevolence, peace and condescension to one another, and to all men. "When ye stand praying," says our Lord, "forgive, if ye have ought against any man." We must do the same when we stand singing. We must bring into the worship of God—into our songs, as well as prayers, a social, meek and quiet spirit.—"Speak to yourselves," or to one another, "in psalms, and let the peace of God rule in your hearts—teach and admonish one another in spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord." We sing with grace and melody, when our devout affections charm down our earthly,

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passions, quiet their tumults, compose all jarring discords, all discontents, anxieties, envies and jealousies, and smooth the soul into peace, gratitude, hope and joy.

One end of social worship, and particularly of singing, is to improve a friendly and benevolent temper. "Be like minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus, that ye may with one mind, and one mouth glorify God." Can we join our voices in singing the same spiritual songs to the same universal parent, and at the same time forget our mutual relation, and our obligation to mutual love? In the music itself there is something adapted to promote a kind and social disposition. The harmonious coincidence, the sweet symphony of different voices teaches our hearts to mingle in Christian duties, hushes tumultuous passions, and expels the evil spirit of pride, envy, malice and discord. When David touched his harp, Saul's evil spirit fled. The man who can hear holy anthems sung to the universal parent, with voices sweetly mingling and harmonizing together, and not feel himself softened into benevolence and love, and moulded into condescension and peace, must have a soul rugged as the rocks, and stubborn as an oak.

## REFLECTIONS.

1. If singing is an instituted part of divine worship, all should take a share in it. Some through want of natural capacity, early education, or favorable opportunity, may be unable to join their voices in this exercise. But these, no less than others, should be concerned to make melody in their hearts.

2. From our subject we learn, that every one according to his ability, is bound to promote the psalmody of the church. As many as are capable should encourage it by acquiring the necessary skill, and taking an active part in it. They who cannot do this, should be more solicitous to promote the object in other ways—



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by furnishing those under their care with the means of instruction—by giving countenance to a revival of sacred music, when it declines, and by cheerfully imparting their money in the cause, as occasion requires. From principles of common equity, as well as from examples recorded in scripture, it is manifest, that the expense of maintaining the psalmody of the church should be assumed by the community, and not left wholly on them who perform the service.

3. Let this thought be deeply impressed on every heart, that psalmody is a branch of divine worship. Let it be regarded, not as a theatrical exhibition, but as a religious solemnity.

When we see an assembly united in the praises of God, hear them sing divine songs with all the charms of music; and, at the same time, behold in their appearance that gravity, sedateness and reverence, which indicate their souls to be impressed with divine things; we are raptured and transported; we are carried into the throngs of God's ancient temple; we almost imagine ourselves in the midst of the heavenly assembly. But if, on the contrary, we observe a behavior, which bespeaks pride, passion, irreverence and levity, we lose the charms of music—we are shocked and confounded. As you regard the honor of God's worship, and your own and the common edification, conduct your psalmody with that gravity, peace and love, which become God's house for ever; and apply this and every part of worship to your preparation for the higher solemnities of God's temple in heaven.

Imagine you saw heaven opened, and the choirs of angels standing before the throne of God; imagine you heard them tuning their harps and voices in anthems of praise to the great Creator of the universe, and the gracious Redeemer of fallen men: Will not the thought elevate you above the dull delights of earth, and prompt a wish to rise and mingle with the celestial worshippers?—Imagine you beheld the Lamb

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standing on mount Zion, and with him the happy thousands who have his Father's name written in their foreheads; and from thence heard a voice, as the sound of many waters and as the noise of mighty thunder, the music of harpers playing on their harps, and the voice of singers singing their new song, which none but the redeemed can learn; would you not wish to join the joyful assembly and mingle your voice with theirs?—Imagine you heard them crying with a loud voice, "Salvation to our God and to the Lamb," and saw them falling before the throne and worshipping God in strains like this, "Amen; blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and strength, be unto God forever and ever, Amen;" would not your souls at such a view, kindle into devotion and love, and burst into songs of praise?—This view of the worshipping assembly above is held forth to us, that we may learn and imitate their piety. Endeavor then so to worship God by singing and all other appointed forms, that you may be admitted to join your voice with theirs in singing the glories of God and the Redeemer through eternal ages.

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# SERMON XLII.

## *Thanksgiving.*

EPHESIANS v. 20.

GIVING *thanks always, for all things to God the Father, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

THE Heathens, in their Bacchanalia, held drunkenness to be commendable, as an expression of gratitude to the god who gave them wine. This Pagan custom the Apostle has in view, when he says to his Ephesian converts, verse 18. "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to yourselves in psalms."—Instead of those abominable excesses, by which you once expressed your joy, seek now those sober and rational pleasures, which are communicated by the Holy Spirit; and instead of those drunken songs by which you formerly celebrated the feasts of the god of wine, speak ye now to one another in psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, making melody in your hearts to the Lord—giving thanks always for all things to God the Father through Jesus Christ."

I. The *duty* here enjoined is to *give thanks.*

Thankfulness is such a sense of favors received from, and of obligations due to a benefactor, as disposes us to make suitable acknowledgments and returns.

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Gratitude to God is attended, not with wild and frantic mirth, but a sober and collected mind. They who understand the loving kindness of the Lord, have wisely considered his doings. God complains of unthankful Israel, "I have nourished and brought up children, but they have rebelled against me. The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib; but Israel doth not know, my people doth not consider."

There are some unusual interpositions of Providence which arrest the attention, while common favors, though in their nature more important, are overlooked, or little regarded. At a comet we gaze with astonishment; but scarcely lift our eyes to the superior wonders which the fair evening presents to our view. The rising and the setting sun, the descent of the enriching showers, the vicissitudes of summer and winter, the continuance of life, the enjoyment of health, supplies of food and raiment, success in our daily employments, the means of knowledge and virtue, and the hopes of glory and immortality, are by multitudes little noticed, and rarely thought of. But where is the man who would not thank God for a short suspension of his torture in a fit of the gout, or for a providential discovery and extinction of a flame which threatened his dwelling? If we regard not the daily operations and blessings of God, we live in habitual unthankfulness. These though most easily overlooked, are most worthy of our notice.

A grateful heart retains the impressions of *past* mercies. "It remembers God's wonders of old, meditates on all his works and forgets not any of his benefits.

Gratitude sees a real *value* in God's blessings. This is its language; "O how great is thy goodness which thou hast laid up for them who fear thee, and hast wrought for them who trust in thee! O love the Lord, all ye his saints."—"O Lord, how great are thy works! Thy thoughts are very deep. A brutish man knoweth not, neither doth a fool understand this. How excellent is thy loving kindness! Therefore the

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sons of men put their trust under the shadow of thy wings.

A sense of our *unworthiness* enters into the essence of thankfulness. Why should we bless God for that, which we call the fruit of our own merit, and which, we think, he could not justly deny us? "I am not worthy," says the patriarch, "of the least of all the mercies which thou hast shewed unto thy servant." "What is man," says David, "that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him? How excellent is thy name in all the earth!

In the exercise of gratitude, we shall *improve* God's favors to the *ends* for which he bestows them. He bestows his benefits upon us, that we may be happy in the enjoyment, and useful in the distribution of them. Solomon says, "I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice and do good in his life." The Apostle directs us, "to offer the sacrifice of praise continually;" and he especially cautions us, that "to do good and to communicate we forget not; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased."

Gratitude delights to *express* its feelings and sentiments. "Offer the sacrifice of praise," says the Apostle, "even the fruit of the lips." We must be thankful to God, and bless his name; praise him with a song, and magnify him with thanksgiving; shew forth his praise and talk of his wonderous works.

Thankfulness studies a suitable return.

The glorious selfsufficient Jehovah can receive no real benefit from us. If we are righteous, what do we to him? He is exalted far above all blessing and praise. But yet, as his creatures and dependants, we are under indispensable obligations to love and serve him. These obligations are mightily increased and strengthened by his favors. His goodness should lead us to repentance. When favor is shewed us, we should learn righteousness. His mercies should persuade us to present ourselves to him, as living sacri-

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fices. This is our reasonable service. His disinterested love should awaken in us sentiments of benevolence to our fellow men. "Love your enemies," says our Saviour, "do good and lend—and ye shall be the children of the Highest; for he is kind to the unthankful and the evil. Be ye merciful, as your Father is mereiful." Let us proceed,

II. To consider the character of that being, to whom our thanks must be supremely directed. "Give thanks to GOD, even the FATHER."

God is the Father of the universe, and the giver of all the blessings which we receive, and which we behold around us. Every good gift comes down from him.

To him we must give thanks; for all things are his. We walk on his earth, and breathe his air; we are sustained by his food, and clothed with his garments; our frame is his work, our reason is his inspiration, and our spirits are preserved by his influence.

To him we must give thanks, for he has given us all things richly to enjoy. He has formed a spacious world for us to inhabit, and subjected a variety of creatures to our dominion. He commands his sun to warm us, his winds to fan us, his rains to refresh us, his fields to support us, and his brutal herds to serve us. He has furnished us with senses and appetites, by which we are capable of delight in the use of material objects; and given us an intelligent mind, which can contemplate him in his works, and enjoy him in his gifts.

This world is a temporary abode, in which we are to prepare for glory and immortality. And God has given us all things which pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Jesus Christ, who has called us to glory and virtue.

To open a way for, and give us a hope of admission to his favor, he has sent his divine Son into our world, who, having assumed our nature, has *borne* our sins in

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his body, expiated our guilt by his death, confirmed the truth of his doctrines by his resurrection, and ever lives in heaven to make intercession for us.

To God we must give thanks, for his goodness is free and disinterested. He gives liberally and upbraids not—he neither faints nor is weary—he is the Father of mercies—his tender mercies are over all his works, and they endure forever.

III. We are required to give thanks *always* to God.

This and other universal terms must be understood with such limitations as the nature of the subject suggests. Various are the duties which religion enjoins; each one claims its place, and none has a right to claim more.

This expression imports, in general, that we ought to be always in a *habit* of thankfulness, and in a *readiness* for *actual* thanksgiving, whenever Providence calls us to it. We must set the Lord always before us, contemplate his continual providence, and our absolute dependence, maintain a serene, cheerful, contented mind, and banish from our hearts all those malignant passions and worldly tempers, which are contrary to a spirit of gratitude; such as envy, malice, pride, ambition and avarice. If we would live in a thankful temper, we must walk by faith in unseen things, have our conversation in heaven, be at peace among ourselves, and put on charity toward all men. The necessity of a friendly, social and charitable Spirit, in order to the exercise of real thankfulness, the Apostle clearly expresses in his exhortation to the Colossians. "Put on bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering—and above all these things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness; and let the peace of God rule in your hearts, and *be ye thankful.*

Thanksgiving should find a place in all our stated addresses to God. We are commanded to "*pray* without ceasing." The expression alludes to the daily

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sacrifice which was offered morning and evening continually. As we are to pray always with all prayer, so we are to offer the sacrifice of praise continually. This must be a part of our morning and evening oblation every day. "Be careful for nothing," says the Apostle, "but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God." Whenever we approach the throne of God, we should bring thither hearts enlarged with gratitude for the things we enjoy, as well as with the desires of the things we need. "Every day," says the Psalmist, "will I bless thee; I will praise thy name for ever and ever. It is a good thing to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to thy name, O most High, to shew forth thy loving kindness in the morning, and thy faithfulness every night,"

All special favors should be distinctly observed and acknowledged. God daily loads us with benefits. "Many are the wonderful works which he has done, and his thoughts, which are to us ward; they cannot be reckoned up in order to him; if we would declare and speak of them, they are more than can be numbered." But there are, in every man's life, and perhaps, in every year, some remarkable interpositions of God —some seasonable protections and deliverances, supplies and comforts, directions and restraints, which cannot be wholly unnoticed, and which ought to be always remembered. If for such as these we give thanks explicitly, and exercise a general gratitude for benefits which cannot be recollected, we then give thanks always.

We should be thankful in every condition. Prosperity should not dissipate, nor adversity drown a sense of our obligations to God. When we receive evil, we also receive good at his hands. And the good becomes more conspicuous, when it is placed over against the evil. God has set the one over against the the other, that man might find nothing after him.



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"Though the figtree shall not blossom," says the prophet, "neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, and joy in the God of my salvation."

We should never cease to give thanks. "*While I* live," says the Psalmist, "I will praise the Lord, I will sing praises to my God, while I have any being. Because thy loving kindness is better than *life*, my lips shall praise thee; thus will I bless thee, while *I live*. Every day will I praise thy name, I will bless thee for ever and ever."

IV. We will next consider the *matters* for which we are to give thanks. These are *all things*.

Walk forth in a cloudless evening; look up *to the* skies, and attempt to number the stars. Where will you begin? How will you proceed? You gaze and wonder at the scene. The objects soon *lose their distinction*. They are mingled in a general blaze.

Such was the state of the Apostle's mind. He recommends the duty, prescribes the manner, and delineates the temper of thanksgiving; but the matters admit no detail. They baffle the power of numbers. It can only be said, "Give thanks *for all things*."

David, bringing his thankoffering before God, begins his address with this remarkable expression, "Praise waiteth," or praise is *silent*, "for thee, O God, in Zion." It is as if he had said, "Such is thine inconceivable excellency, and unbounded goodness—such is the countless multitude of thy mercies, that, when we attempt thy praise, our tongues faulter, our devotion sinks under the weight of the subject. We cannot express; we silently adore thy glories."

"Who can utter the mighty acts of the Lord? Who can shew forth all his praise?"—How precious are thy thoughts unto us, O God? How great is the sum of them? If I should count them, they are more

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in number than the sand."—"I will hope continually; I will praise thee more and more; I will shew forth thy righteousness and thy salvation all the day, for I know not the number thereof."

Take a review of your life from the early period of youth. How kindly have you been sustained? How bountifully have your wants been supplied? How often have dangers been prevented, afflictions shortened, temptations diverted, disappointments turned to success, and imagined evils made productive of real good?

Look around on your neighbors, and see what blessings attend them. For these blessings give thanks. Their charity will impart to you a share in the good they enjoy; and your benevolence may appropriate the whole. While you rejoice in another's prosperity, you divide it with him. You take the better half. Yours is pure and refined: The grosser part is left to him.

Blessings bestowed on others are for your sake as well as theirs. How often has your thirst been relieved by streams from the fountain of the rich? How often has your heart been cheered by the smiles of the contented and happy? How often have your good resolutions been strengthened by the counsels of the wise and the example of the virtuous?

Contemplate the benefits of civil society. You partake in the national peace, plenty, prosperity and happiness. Under the protection of a righteous government you sit securely in your house, sleep undisturbed in your bed, go forth into your field without danger of an enemy, walk the streets without fear of an assassin, and lay up the fruits of your labor without concern that thieves will break through and steal.

Consider your religious privileges. The gospel of the Son of God, which is in your hands, opens to your view most astonishing glories in the future world—glories which eye had not seen, nor ear heard, nor human heart imagined. It marks the path to heaven by the

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plainest precepts, and encourages your progress by the most gracious promises. And though darkness may sometimes surround you, yet light soon arises in obscurity. Though the dispensations of God seem mysterious, yet all things are working for good to them who love him. They are heirs of his kingdom; they shall inherit all things.

What is there, then, for which the good man may not give thanks? All things are his. No real good will be withheld. Nothing will separate him from the love of God.

V. We are now to consider the *medium* of our access to God in this duty, "The name of Jesus Christ."

God putteth no trust in his saints; the heavens are not clean in his sight. How much less man that is a worm—man that is a sinner? We are not *worthy* to speak to him in praise for the benefits which we receive—much less to ask of him *farther benefits*—least of all to receive the benefits which we ask. We are therefore directed not only to pray, but also to give thanks in the name of Christ, who has purchased by his blood the blessings which we need, who has opened for us by his intercession, a way of access to the throne of grace, and through whom alone, such guilty creatures can acceptably draw near to God. "Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life; no man cometh to the Father, but by him." Whatever therefore we do, in word or deed, we must do all in his name, praying and giving thanks to God, even the Father, by him.

We have taken a view of the important duty of thanksgiving. And we see, that this is not a work merely for one day in a year, but for every day that we live. We must give thanks always.

Let us not imagine, that by recounting a few remarkable favors, we have discharged our obligations to God; we are to give thanks for all things.

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Let us not think, that to appear publicly in God's house and to feed plentifully at our tables, is the essence of thanksgiving; we must bring to God the offering of grateful hearts, feel a sense of his goodness and our unworthiness, exercise repentance for our sins, devote ourselves to him to walk in newness of life and do good, and communicate to one another, as there is occasion. With such sacrifices God is well pleased.

Nature itself points out our obligation to thanksgiving. Being endued with reason and speech, we are capable of observing the merciful works of God, and of expressing the grateful and admiring sentiments of our hearts. David calls his tongue his glory, because with this he could praise his Creator. "My heart is fixed; I will sing and give praise with my glory." The Apostle exhorts us to "offer unto God the fruit of the lips, giving thanks to his name."

Even sinners love those who love them; and do good to those, who do good to them. This is natural. Hence the unthankful are ranked among those who are without natural affection. If gratitude to one another is a dictate of nature, shall not reason and religion lead up our hearts to God?

The ox knows his owner, and the ass his master's crib. Shall not we consider and acknowledge him who has nourished and brought us up as children?

The creation around us, gives us lectures on thankfulness, and exhibits the propriety of making returns for benefits. The rivers discharge into the sea the waters which they derive from it. The skies remit in copious showers the collections which they exhale from the earth in vapors. The fields by a fruitful increase repay the husbandman's toil, and bring forth herbs meet for those by whom they are dressed. All nature subsists by an interchange of kindnesses. Harmony and order are the beauty of the natural world. Piety and benevolence are the beauty of the moral world.

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If we are dependent upon God and every good gift comes from him—if we are sinners under a forfeiture of all his favors—if we have done nothing to deserve, and can do nothing to remunerate his benefits, but all proceed from his selfmoving love; then we must be eternally bound to render praise to his name. "What shall we render to the Lord for all his benefits? We will offer him the sacrifice of thanksgiving."

Praise is pleasant, as well as comely. Prayer reminds us of our wants, confession wounds us with a sense of guilt. But praise refreshes the soul with the memory of God's exceeding goodness, and brings to view the happy circumstances of our condition. "O, taste and see that that the Lord is good: Blessed is the man who trusteth in him."

What more delightful sentiments can fill our souls, than such as these? The great ruler of the universe graciously regards us and daily watches over us, makes us the subjects of a thousand blessings, and employs us as agents to scatter his bounties among our fellow creatures; admits us into his presence, and allows us to converse with him; imparts his influence to direct our way, and gives us his grace to prepare us for heaven.

Thanksgiving is better than prayer and confession, for it will never fail. When all our sins are purged away by divine grace, and all our wants are swallowed up in the divine fulness—when we dwell in God's presence, where is joy supreme, and sit at his right hand where are pleasures never failing, there will be no more occasion for penitent confession of sin, strong cries for mercy, and groanings which cannot be uttered. The glories of divine wisdom, grace and love will be all our theme—gratitude and praise will be all our devotion.

Habitual thankfulness adds much to the happiness of life. This softens our cares, lightens our troubles, mitigates our griefs, dispels our gloom, brightens up the soul, and smoothes the temper into serenity and cheer-

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fulness. Ingratitude is sullen, morose and peevish; it gives a disrelish to every favor, and increases the smart of every affliction.

Praise has been the work of saints on earth, and is the employment of angels in heaven. Let us therefore give thanks always, for all things, to God through Jesus Christ, that we may now be prepared, and hereafter admitted to join with happy spirits above, in ascribing blessing, and honor, and glory, and power, and thanksgiving to him who sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb forever and ever.

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# SERMON XLIII.

## *Mutual Submission.*

EPHESIANS v. 21.

*Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.*

THE Apostle, having exhorted the Ephesian Christians to the duties of social worship, next passes to inculcate several relative duties. This subject he begins with a general exhortation to all Christians to "submit themselves one to another." His subjoining *this* to his exhortation concerning social worship, intimates, that one great use of joint devotion is the promotion of peace, humility and condescension.

This submission to others can no farther be a duty, than it is consistent with our obligations to God. Therefore the Apostle says, "Submit yourselves one to another *in the fear of God.*" "The wisdom which is from above, is first *pure*, and then peaceable." The Christian, who is bought with a price, must not be a servant of men. The sense of our text is fully explained by other parallel instructions. "Ye younger, submit yourselves to the elder, and be ye all subject one to another, and be clothed with humility." "Let nothing be done through strife and vain glory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than him-

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self."—"With brotherly love in honor prefer one another."

This temper was exemplified and recommended by our Lord, when he washed his disciples feet, and instructed them to wash one another's feet. He tells us, that in his kingdom the ostentatious distinctions, so common in the world, shall be unknown; that in point of obligation to justice and charity, all shall stand on a level, with only such difference as arises from their respective abilities: That the highest in office and condition shall claim no other preeminence, than a superior obligation to usefulness. This is his meaning when he says, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and they who exercise authority upon them, are called benefactors: But ye shall not be so; but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve; even as the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister."

Among men God dispenses his blessings with a sovereign hand; to some he gives more, and to others less. But no man is exalted to a state of independence. They who are in highest authority, and in most affluent condition, whatever pride they may feel in themselves, and whatever envy others may feel toward them, are really as dependent, as helpless and as incapable of subsisting by themselves, as the poorest of the human race; yea, more so, for they are less able to endure the hardships, and perform the labors of life. And it ought to be remembered, that in the continual fluctuation of human affairs, the rich and the poor may exchange conditions; and the former be reduced to such impotence, as to need the help of those whom now they despise.

This diversity among men displays the sovereignty, wisdom and goodness of God; reminds us of our constant dependence; renders us mutually useful; and



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gives opportunity for the exercise of many virtues, for which in a state of equality there would be no room.

The duties which we owe to one another in this diversity of rank and condition, our Apostle expresses by mutual submission. This will best be illustrated by considering it in the different relations of life.

1. It will easily be perceived, that a degree of submission is due to *superiors*. Particularly,

You must reverence your superiors in *age*, not treat them with insolence, or assume an impudent familiarity; but pay a respectful deference to their hoary hairs, long experience, grave deportment and sedate advice. "Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head," says Moses, "and honor the face of the old man." It is a proof of great depravity, when "the youth behaves himself proudly against the ancient, and the base against the honorable."

To superiors in *knowledge* and *wisdom* you must shew submission, by consulting them in your doubts and paying respect to their judgment. And if you see reason to dissent from them, let it be done, not with haughty assurance, but with modest caution.

Honor a *pious* and *virtuous* character, wherever you see it; whether in the rich or poor, in the learned or illiterate. Never attempt to detract from it, but place it before you for your imitation, and propose it to others for theirs.

Obey your superiors in *authority*. Cheerfully submit to their just commands, and by your peaceable behavior support and extend their influence. Though in civil society, legitimate authority originates from the people, yet when they have, in any form, consented to lodge certain powers in the hands of particular persons, these persons then become their superiors, and are entitled to their obedience and support in the execution of the powers committed to them. Every attempt to control or embarrass officers of government

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in the discharge of their duty, is an offence against nature and society, reason and christianity.

2. Mutual subjection may be considered, as it respects *equals*.

All men have the same immutable right to an equitable treatment from all with whom they have intercourse. The poor man has as good a claim to justice from the rich, as the rich man has from the poor—the private citizen from the magistrate, as the magistrate from the private citizen. This mutual submission implies, that every man should do justice to every man with whom he is concerned; should treat his person with humanity, his character with tenderness, his conduct with candor, and his substance with equity.

All men, as far as their condition requires, are alike entitled to compassion and assistance from those around them. We are to relieve the unhappy, supply the needy, support the weak, vindicate the injured, as far as our ability will extend, and our other obligations will justify. "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

Equals must preserve an affable and obliging deportment; rather decline, than assume a preeminence—rather yield than affect a superiority. "Love as brethren; be pitiful; be courteous—in honor prefer one another."

This Spirit is peculiarly beautiful and pleasant, when it runs through societies, and unites all the parts into one compact whole. Then each member seeks the profit of many in preference to his own; cheerfully yields to his brethren the preeminence, rejoices in their distinguished merits; and studies to rise, not on their ruin, but on his own virtue and usefulness.

Mutual subjection ought especially to be seen in families. The subordinate members should dwell together in unity, and by love serve one another. The heads should consider themselves as one in interest, and should act as having one Spirit; not enter into

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contests for superiority, undermine each other's influence and destroy domestic government; but, by mutual condescension and prudent concurrence, strengthen each other's hands and promote the common happiness. All points should be carried by cool advice and gentle persuasion; not by pertinacious contradiction and unyielding opposition. Thus "two are *better* than one, for if they fall, one will lift up his fellow."

3. There is a submission due to those, who, on some accounts, may be deemed our *inferiors*.

The same person may, in different relations, be to the same person both a superior and an inferior. Solomon, as *king* of Israel, was superior to his mother; As a *son* he was her inferior. In the *natural* relation he owed reverence to *her*; In the *civil* relation she owed obedience to him. When she interceded *with* the king for Adonijah, she made her motion, not with the authority of a parent but with *the duty* of a subject. And when she came into his presence, *he received*, her, not as an ordinary subject, but as a parent. He rose up to meet her, bowed himself to her, and seated her on his right hand.

Farther: Superiors as such owe a respect to *those* who are below them. They should be easy of access, gentle in their language and condescending in their deportment. Rulers are to be ministers of God for good to the people for whom they act—the rich are to distribute to the needy—the strong are to bear the infirmities of the weak—every one is to please his neighbors for their good to edification.

4. This mutual submission ought to appear in Christian *churches*. It is to the members of the Ephesian church, that this advice is addressed; and all in that particular character are bound to apply it.

Christ has instituted a government in his kingdom; but it is a soft and persuasive, not a violent and compulsive government. "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace in all churches of the saints,

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There is need of mutual submission between *ministers* and the *people* of their charge.

Ministers are in some respects to be subject to their people. They are not lords over God's heritage. They have no dominion over any man's faith and conscience. They are to be servants of all men, examples to believers and helpers of their joy. Within the sphere of their office they have an authority; but it is an authority given for edification only; not for destruction. They are to labor not for their own private emolument, but for the salvation of others; and to be made all things to all men, that by all means they may save some. They must not, indeed, seek to please men by servile compliances and temporizing arts. If they thus please men, they are not the servants of Christ. They may no farther accommodate themselves to men, than is consistent with their being under the law to God.

They are to feed the flock of God—that flock especially over which the Holy Ghost has made them overseers. And while they find support and encouragement in this service, they are not to relinquish it for worldly honors and emoluments, nor to neglect it for the indulgence of ease, or the acquisition of lucre. They are to abide in their calling; to be quiet and do their own business; not to forsake their charge, and ramble abroad under pretence of serving other churches, and doing more extensive good.

On the other hand, there are duties which people owe to their ministers. These duties you will find clearly stated by St. Paul. "Know them who labor among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you. Esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake."—"Obey them who have the rule over you, and submit yourselves, for they watch for your souls."—"Let him that is taught in the word, communicate to him that teacheth, in all good things."—"The Lord hath ordained that they who preach the

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gospel, should live of the gospel."—"Brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course."

As ministers are not lords over Christ's heritage, so you are not blindly to follow their opinions, not implicitly to obey their mandates. "Call no man your master, on earth, for one is your master, even Christ." There is, however, a submission which you owe *them*. You are to esteem them in their office, and regard them as servants of Christ, and your servants for his sake. You may never hastily receive, nor rashly propagate an accusation against them, which might injure their character, or obstruct their usefulness; but you must support their just reputation both as ministers and as men.

As they are called to labor among you in word and doctrine, you must attend on their ministrations with diligence, and receive the word from them with meekness and be cautious that you impede not its influence on your own hearts by a cavilling *humor*, and hinder not its effect on others by captious objections.

As they are to warn the unruly, and rebuke open transgressors, so you must apply their admonitions as far as they are pertinent to your own case, and aid the just operations of them on all concerned.

As they are to instruct and convince gainsayers, so, when you hear from them a doctrine diverse from your former sentiments, you are to examine it without prejudice; and, if the evidence of truth is on their side, submit with joy to the correction of your mistakes. If, on the contrary, you conclude them to be in an error, traduce them not as heretics; talk not against them by the walls and in the doors of your houses; but state to *them* the grounds of your dissatisfaction, and by friendly conference, labor to rectify *their* mistake, or to see *your own*.

As they are ambassadors for Christ, sent to open the terms of peace, submit to these terms, and become reconciled to God.

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Pray for them, that utterance may be given them to speak the word boldly, as they ought to speak. Treat them with such kindness, that they may be among you without fear, while they work the work of God. And as they communicate to you spiritual things, impart to them temporal things in such manner, that they may pursue this work without interruption. If religious knowledge is conveyed by the word which they preach; if spiritual strength is increased by the ordinances which they administer; if God has constituted them as guides to lead you in the way to heaven, as pastors to feed you, as watchmen to warn you, and as stewards to dispense his gifts among you; there is then every reason why you should honor them in their office, submit to them in the execution of it, and pray for them, that the word of God may be glorified.

There ought to be a mutual submission among the *members* of the church. For there is an authority given to all collectively over each particular member. The church is to inspect, exhort, admonish and censure her members, as their cases may require; and each member is to consider himself as under her discipline both by his own covenant and by Christ's command; and to this discipline he is bound peaceably to submit, as far as it is administered agreeably to the gospel.

Christians are to consider one another, that they may provoke unto love and good works—to study the things which make for the common edification and comfort, and to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. They should not withdraw themselves from the church for every cause, either for supposed errors in it, for personal dislike to the pastor, or for disgust at a discipline, which affects them or their particular friends; but should rather labor by gospel means to remove the cause of their offence, and to preserve the general peace.

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In order to this mutual *submission*, there must be a spirit of *humility*. These St. Peter places in connexion. "Be ye all *subject* one to another, and be clothed with *humility*." This will dispose Christians to think soberly of their own knowledge and goodness, and in honor to prefer one another. An undue opinion of themselves is the cause of all their assuming behavior. It is this, that makes them treat superiors with insolence, equals with rudeness and inferiors with contempt. It is this, that makes them forward to dictate, and backward to be advised; obstinate in their own ways and impatient of control; confident in their own opinions and deaf to the voice of reason. It is this, that makes them create imaginary, and overrate real injuries; resentful of reproof, and scornful of instruction. This is the main source of contentions, and the greatest bar to reconciliation.

A humble view of ourselves will produce quite contrary effects. This will make us swift to *hear*, *slow* to speak, open to conviction, ready to retract our errors and confess our faults, free to receive advice, and prompt to acknowledge a kindness. This will lead us to give honor where it is due, to condescend to men of low estate, to bear the infirmities of the weak, and to follow peace with all men.

Religion begins in humbleness of mind—in a conviction of our own guilt and unworthiness. In this conviction we must apply to the mercy of God in the name of Jesus for pardon, grace and glory. In this humble application of the soul to God, through a mediator, consists true and saving faith. Faith is a meek, submissive, peaceable grace. It begins in a sight of ourselves as sinners, and in a view of Christ as a gracious and sufficient Saviour. The life of the Christian is by the faith of the Son of God; and this faith operates to increasing humility, condescension and love. The nearer he keeps to Christ, the more he will learn from him, and the more he will be as-

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similated to him who is meek and lowly. The stronger is his faith, the deeper will be his humiliation, and the more ardent and diffusive his love. "Let us therefore purify our souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren; and love one another with a pure heart fervently, as becomes those who are born of incorruptible seed, even by the word of God, which liveth and abideth forever."



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# SERMON XLIV.

## *Duties of Husbands and Wives.*

EPHESIANS v. 22——33.

*Wives submit yourselves to your own husbands as unto the Lord: for the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church; and he is the Saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject to Christ, so let their wives be to their own husbands in every thing.*

*Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it, that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives, as their own bodies:—He that loveth his wife loveth himself;—for no man ever yet hated his own flesh, but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church; for we are members of his body, of his flesh and of his bones. For this cause shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall be joined to his wife, and they two shall be one flesh. This is a great mystery; but I speak concerning Christ and the church. Nevertheless, let every one of us in particular so love his wife, even as himself; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.*

THE Apostle having, in the preceding part of this epistle, stated and inculcated the various duties, which Christians more generally owe to one another, comes now to the consideration of the relative and domestic duties.

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In the words just read, he particularly explains and powerfully urges the duties of the conjugal relation.

As this is the first, so it is the most important relation, that ever existed in the human race; and the obligations arising from it, ought to be seriously considered and sacredly regarded. The happiness of the relation, its usefulness to civil and religious society, the honor of the family, the education of children, and the interest of religion in the world, much depend on the prudent and faithful discharge of the duties which the husband and wife owe to each other. Of these duties, there is no passage in scripture, which gives a clearer view than this before us. But while we attend to this, we shall naturally introduce other passages relative to the same subject.

You will here observe,

That there are some duties which these correlates owe to each other in common.

That there are some particularly incumbent on the wife toward her husband. And,

That there are some especially incumbent on the husband toward his wife.

These several obligations I shall explain; and shall also apply in their place the arguments which the Apostle uses to enforce them.

I. I begin with those which are common to both the correlates.

The husband and wife are, in some respects, *equals*. Hence there are several duties alike incumbent on both. The Apostle alluding to the union of the first pair, and to the first institution of marriage, says, "A man shall leave his father and mother, and shall be jointo his wife, and they two shall be *one flesh*."

This relation is founded in mutual consent; and the consent does, or ought to proceed from mutual affection, and to be preserved by mutual kindness.

As these relatives are one, and have one common interest, they ought to act with an undivided concern for the happiness of the family.

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Being one flesh, they are to dwell together as heirs of the grace of life. The husband is not to put away his wife, nor she to depart from him.

They are alike bound to mutual fidelity and a chaste conversation. They are to avoid, not only the gross violations of the conjugal vow, but that light behavior and wanton language which indicate an impure mind, or which might insensibly transfer the affections to an unlawful object, or create the suspicion of a wandering desire.

They are under equal obligations to study each other's peace and comfort, to take part in each other's pains and distresses, to assist in each other's duties and services, and to support each other's reputation and honor. Every thing of this kind is comprised in the Apostle's direction, "To render to each other due benevolence."

The instruction and education of their children and domestics; the giving and receiving of seasonable advice; and praying with and for one another, are duties common to both, and implied in that expression of St. Peter, "that they live together as heirs of the grace of life, that so their prayers may not be hindered."

II. There are some duties peculiarly incumbent on the wife. These the Apostle expresses by the terms *submission*, *reverence*, *obedience* and *subjection*.

"Wives submit yourselves to your own husbands, as unto the Lord—for the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church. As the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their husbands in every thing. Let the wife see, that she reverence her husband."

He cannot intend, that the wife in every thing should yield an implicit obedience to her husband, as the church to Christ; but only that she should be subject to him in all things agreeable to the will of Christ. So he states her obedience in his epistle to the Colossians, "Wives submit yourselves to your own husbands, as is fit in the Lord."

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The husband though the head of the wife, is not to treat her as a menial servant, and exact from her an unlimited subjection. This is to assume an authority, which Christ has not communicated to him. Both should act, as having one soul, and combine their influence in the government of the household. But when there happens a diversity of sentiment, and neither can impart conviction, the obligation to recede, doubtless lies first on the woman.

The Apostle says, "The woman ought not to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence with all subjection." For this he assigns several reasons. He says, "Adam was first formed, and then Eve." He therefore had a natural precedence. "The man is not of the woman, but the woman of the man," being formed out of him, and made of his flesh and bone. "Neither was the man created for the woman, but she for the man," to be an help meet for him. "And Adam was not" first "deceived," and drawn into the apostasy, "but the woman being deceived was," first in the transgression." For this cause God ordered, that "her desire should be to her husband, and he should rule over her."

But the reason alleged, in the text, for this subjection, is the example of the church. The first marriage was an emblem of the union between Christ and his church. As the woman was bone of man's bone, and flesh of his flesh, so "we are members of Christ's body, of his flesh and of his bones." And the ancient institution, "They two shall be one flesh," was a mystical representation of this spiritual relation.

Now since the church is subject to Christ, the woman ought to be subject to her husband, who, by Christ's authority, is constituted her head.

A family should resemble a church in union, peace and subordination. In a church there could be no edification, if there were no government; neither in a family could there be order, if there were no head.

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Either of them, without rule, must be dissolved, or live in perpetual discord. Christ is the head of the church; and all its members are bound to obey the government which he has instituted. The husband, under him, is ruler in his own house; and when he governs it according to the laws of Christ, all the members are to be subject to him. Thus the family *will* become a *little* church; and, being edified in knowledge and virtue, will grow into a meetness to join the general assembly and church of the first born, whose names are written in heaven.

The honor and interest of religion require, that wives, by a cheerful subordination, cooperate with their husbands in all the important concerns of the household, and in the nurture, education and government of the dependent members. Hence *this direction* of Paul to Titus, "Charge them to be sober, to respect their husbands, to love *their children, to be* discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, *obedient to* their husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed;" or that the gospel be not reproached among heathens by means of the confusions and disorders in Christian families. We proceed,

III. To consider the duties of husbands to their wives. These the Apostle expresses by the word LOVE.

Under this word he comprises all those kind offices, which love, in so intimate and tender a connexion, will naturally dictate. Love here stands opposed to sharpness and severity. "Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them." Though the wife by the order of creation, the manner of the apostacy, and the injunctions of the gospel, is bound to obey; yet the husband is not warranted to exercise an arbitrary authority. He is to maintain the superiority with gentleness, always considering his wife as his associate, closely allied to him by the strongest bonds of friendship and interest. "He must not be bitter against

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her." This is a metaphor taken from the disgust excited by bitter objects of taste. He should not, by a peevish, morose and haughty carriage, render himself ungrateful and offensive to her, like wormwood to the mouth. He should not be provoked to wrath, aversion and upbraiding by her trivial imperfections and accidental failings, as the stomach is provoked to disgust by loathsome food. The near connexion between the parties renders that language and behavior bitter, which, in other circumstances, would be indifferent. The malice of an enemy may make little impression, when the coldness of a friend would be deeply felt. Ill usage from a stranger may excite anger; but from a near relative it awakens the tenderest sensations of grief. What chiefly wounds in such cases is the defeat of our expectations. We love, and would be beloved; we esteem, and would be esteemed. But failing of these returns, we are afflicted and disconsolate. The reason why harsh words and unkind usage are so peculiarly grievous in near relations, is because they are so little expected, and so entirely unmerited. The mind is full of other hopes, and is surprised to find them deceived.—When, instead of gentleness, condescension and affability, the wife only meets with sullen reserve, or ungenerous upbraidings, her tender feelings are deeply wounded. A tongue thus whet is keener than a sword. Such sharpened words pierce deeper than an arrow.

The Apostle Peter directs the husband "to dwell with the wife according to knowledge, giving honor to her, as to the weaker vessel"—to treat her with lenity and softness, as vessels of finer mould and weaker contexture must be handled with care and tenderness—to regard her as an intimate friend—to support her authority in the household—to protect her person from insults—to uphold her reputation—to feel for her pains and injuries—to place confidence in her discretion and fidelity—and to render her condition easy and happy.

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"Whoever considers to what peculiar difficulties and trials God has subjected this part of the human species, both by the tenderness of their frame, and by the lot assigned them, will see himself bound to treat his wife with gentleness, and to sustain her under all her infirmities. And if he farther considers, of what use such a friend is in all the changes of life—what solace in health, comfort in sickness, and relief in distress her good offices afford him—and what peculiar burdens fall to her share in the nurture and education of children, he will find himself bound, in point of justice and gratitude, to study her happiness; and will feel the propriety of those divine precepts, which require him to love his wife, and give her honor as the more tender vessel."

But this brings me, to consider the reasons alleged why the husband should love his wife.

One argument is the example *of Christ.* "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved *the church.*"

One end of Christ's appearance in the flesh was to set us an example of our duty. As he never sustained the tender domestic relations, he could not exhibit a direct example of the duties resulting from *them.* But then his relation to the church is so similar to that subsisting between husband and wife, that the *latter* is often compared to, and illustrated by the former. He is called the bridegroom, and his church the bride. Hence his love to the church is improved as an argument to enforce on husbands the duties which they owe to their wives.

Having mentioned the love of Christ, the Apostle so strongly feels the argument, that, he expatiates and enlarges upon it. "Christ loved the church and gave himself for it." Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend; but Christ commended his love toward us, in that, while we were enemies, he died for us. He has purchased for himself a church with his own blood. He has re-

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deemed her from bondage, introduced her into a state of freedom, and admitted her to an intimate communion with himself.

He gave himself for the church, "that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word." The great end for which he brings us into the church is, that we might be sanctified. In order to our sanctification, he has appointed his word and ordinances, which we are to attend upon with this view. The work of the Spirit in our sanctification is not immediate, but by his word and ordinances. And it is only in our attendance on these, that we obtain his sanctifying grace. Do not then imagine, that you ought to absent yourselves from the church, until you are sanctified—that you are first to become holy, and afterward to attend on the institutions of Christ as evidences that you are holy. But remember that "Christ gave himself for the church, that he might cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, and thus finally present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing."

In the present state there will be some spots and wrinkles in the church. There will be in it some unsanctified members; and the saints themselves will be sanctified only in part. But in the future state, the church will be perfectly cleansed. Hypocrites will be utterly excluded, and the saints will be sanctified wholly.

Christ has given his word and ordinances, that by them his body may be edified, and that we all may come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God unto perfect men, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

This example teaches us, that Christians ought to love one another,—to bear one another's burdens, forgive each other's offences, and assist each other in those spiritual exercises, which are preparatives for heaven. It teaches us, that husbands are especially bound to



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love their wives, and, by such kind offices, to express their love to them. This is to love them, as Christ loved the church.

Another reason for this love in the conjugal relation is, that "whoso loveth his wife, loveth himself." The parties are one flesh, and have one interest; and "no man hates his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it." Every dishonor or injury, which a man does to so intimate a relative, recoils on himself. He must eventually suffer it. His peace, reputation and prosperity greatly depend on the virtue, discretion, serenity and contentment of his wife. If therefore he loves himself, he ought to love her, to bear her burdens, relieve her distresses, contribute to her cheerfulness, encourage her virtues, discover a satisfaction in her discreet behavior, and joyfully accept her friendly assistance in the government of the family, and in the management of their common concerns. In cases of misconduct, he ought not to upbraid with severity, but to expostulate with tenderness. And in cases of difference in opinon, he ought not to oppose with haughtiness, but either to convince by reason, or dissent with moderation.

The happiness of a parent depends much on the virtuous manners of his children; and their virtue will greatly depend on union in the heads of the household. This union can be preserved only by a mild and discreet carriage toward each other. If the husband is the head of the wife, the peace of the family will chiefly lie with him. If he expects submission from her, let him fill his superior station with such virtue and wisdom, as to obtain it without controversy. Submission is then most easily gained, when it is most obviously merited. If there is no prudence, dignity or virtue in the conduct of the man, he has little reason to expect, and less right to claim a cheerful obedience from his wife. The man who acts worthily in his place at the head of a family, will seldom need to enter

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into a debate for superior authority. It will usually be yielded without reluctance.

The similitude, which the Apostle here, and in divers other places, draws between a family and a church, suggests to us that religion, in every family, should be an object of principal regard; for without this the resemblance will not hold. It is only the religious husband who governs his family, as Christ governs the church. It is only the religious wife, who obeys her husband, as the church obeys Christ. Where the spirit of religion reigns in both, the union will be easy, and their joint government will have efficacy.

As a family should resemble a church, so it ought to be subordinate to the church; and the church should assist in the government of it.

Parents should early dedicate their children to Christ; for he has said, "Suffer little children to come to me, and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven." They should educate their children for him and seek his blessing upon them. They should instruct them in his religion and exemplify it to them in their own daily conversation. They should assist their children in their devotions, and require their attendance on the stated worship of the family. And when they arrive to proper age, parents, should encourage their approach to the ordinances of Christ in his church, that thereby they may be sanctified and made meet for the church which is above.

If families were as little churches, the church would receive from them continual accessions; new members would be added to it, and Christ's house would be full.

The decline or revival of religion will usually keep pace with the neglect or support of family order and discipline. And the maintenance of family religion depends on nothing more than the union of the heads. If with them there is strife and contention, the house will be filled with confusion and very evil work. If

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they are divided in their opinions, and embittered in their feelings; if they look on each other with jealousy and distrust; if they frequently fall into passionate altercations and disputes; if the wife pays no regard to her husband's pleasure, and he puts no confidence in her discretion; prayer will be hindered, or performed without devotion. For how can they unite in prayers and praises to God, who unite in nothing else, and are become more distant in affection, than if they never had been made one flesh. How can they command obedience from their children, who appear to have no government of themselves?—How can they form their domestics to virtue, who exhibit an example inconsistent with virtue, and shew themselves to be wanting in a most capital branch of religion?

Let us then who stand in this connexion, by reciprocal love and good offices honor our profession and promote each other's happiness, as *being heirs together of the grace of life.* Then our prayers will not be hindered.

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# SERMON XLV.

## *Duties of Parents and Children.*

EPHESIANS vi. 1, 2, 3, 4.

*Children obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. Honor thy father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise, that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth. And ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath; but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*

IN these words the Apostle states the duty of children to their parents, and the duty of parents to their children,

We will consider them distinctly. First.

The Apostle addresses himself to *children* in an exhortation to obey and honor their parents. "Obey your parents in the Lord;" or in compliance with the command of the Lord, which says, "Honor thy father and mother." To enforce this exhortation he reminds children, that the command to "honor their parents," is distinguished from the others by a particular promise of the divine favor. "This is the first commandment with promise."—The promise is, "Thou shalt live long on the earth." This promise the Apostle interprets, not as confined to temporal prosperity, nor yet as absolutely insuring long life; but as signifying in general, that "it shall be well with them;"

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or that God will bestow on them such things, as his perfect wisdom sees to be best for them. "Obey your parents—for this is right." It is plainly reasonable in itself and acceptable to God, that children, who are young and inexperienced, weak and dependent, should honor and obey those who naturally care for them, who are charged with their support and education, and whose superior wisdom and riper experience, enable them to judge for their children, better than children can judge for themselves.

The obedience and honor, which children owe to their parents, comprise several things which are of great importance in this relation.

1. Children owe to their parents an inward *affection* and *regard*.

Their obedience should flow from *love*, *gratitude* and *esteem*.

Without a correspondent principle in the heart, external tokens of honor are of little value. The love which parents bear to their children entitles them to reciprocal affection.

Consider, you who are young, in what various ways your parents have expressed and continue still to testify their regard for you. They have supplied the wants of your helpless infancy; watched over the motions of your heedless childhood, and guided the steps of your giddy and unthinking youth. They have spared no pains to inform your minds and regulate your manners, to rear you to manhood, and mould you to virtue. They have anxiously attended you in times of sickness and trembled for you in hours of danger. And your happy return to health and safety has filled their hearts with joy, and their mouths with praise. You, who have seen a brother or a sister wrapt in the funeral shroud, have, at the same time, witnessed the anguish of your parents. Such would have been their anguish, had the same shroud embraced your cold limbs. How are they distressed, when, by your unworthy behavior,

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you bring shame and dishonor on yourselves! What pleasure fills their souls, when they see you improving in knowledge and goodness, and rising to reputation and esteem! All their worldly labors and cares have your welfare and honor for their principal object. Their earthly hopes and prospects are in you.

Can you, my young friends, think seriously on these instances of your parents' regard and affection, and not feel yourselves bound to return love for love? You love those companions, who associate with you in your amusements and diversions. Can you be indifferent to your parents, who daily employ their time, strength and thoughts in promoting your comfort and welfare, and in laying a foundation for your honor in this world, and your happiness in the next?

If at any time, you feel uneasy under the restraints, which they lay upon you, consider, whether they have not given you full proof of their benevolence; and believe that these restraints are kindly intended.

2. You are to *honor* your parents by external tokens of *respect*.

Solomon, though his regal dignity raised him superior to all around him, yet forgot not the honor due to a parent. When his mother approached him, he rose to meet her, and bowed himself to her, and placed her on his right hand.

The natural superiority of your parents, and the important relation which they bear to you, oblige you to be submissive in your carriage, dutiful in your manners, and respectful in all that you speak to them in their presence, or say concerning them in their absence.

There is nothing which shocks us more, than to see a youth behave toward his parents with insolence, or to hear him treat their characters with derision.

Never, my children, never expose the secret failings of a parent. You will thus bring dishonor on yourselves, and on the family. If, at any time, you should

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have occasion to mention some public instances of his misconduct, speak with prudent caution and tenderness—with filial grief and concern; not in a way of ridicule, mockery and contempt. The impiety of Ham in deriding his father's miscarriage, brought on him a lasting curse; while the filial dutifulness of the other sons, in endeavoring to conceal his shame, entailed a blessing on them and their posterity.

3. You are to *obey* the just commands of your parents.

"Obey your parents in the Lord." You are to honor God as supreme, and *them* in obedience to *him*. "If any man love father or mother more than me," says our Lord, he is not worthy of me." If a parent should enjoin any thing contrary to the will of God, you cannot be bound to obey: For the authority of God, and the obligations of virtue are always superior to the commands of men. "*Obey your parents in all things*;" says the Apostle, "for this *is well pleasing* to the Lord." You must make it your first aim to please God; and in all things agreeable to his will, you must be obedient to them. In matters of which you are not competent to form a judgment, you must submit to their authority, and confide in their superior wisdom. If in these cases you err, the error will be to them, not to you.

You should obey them cheerfully, without complaining, or answering again—without evading or shifting off their orders. For this you have the example of Christ, who, in his youth, was subject to his parents. There is a particular curse denounced against the child, "whose eye mocketh at his father, and despiseth to obey his mother."

4. You are not only to obey their express commands, while you are under their authority, but to receive, with *decent* and *humble regard*, the instructions, counsels and reproofs, which they may see fit to communicate afterward. From their age and experience you

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may, perhaps, derive some real benefit, as long as they shall live. Though their authority will be superseded by your maturity, yet their affection for you and relation to you will be terminated only by death. Never, therefore, reject with contempt their grave advice or serious rebuke; but hear it with attention, examine it with calmness, apply and obey it, as far as reason will justify. "A wise son heareth a father's instruction; but a scorner heareth not rebuke. A fool despiseth the instruction of his father; but he that regardeth reproof is prudent."

5. You are to *remember*, and, if there is occasion, you are also to *remunerate* the favors, which you have received from your parents.

You must comfort and support them under their infirmities, relieve the pains and lighten the burdens of their declining years, and be the staff of their tottering age. This is the instruction of Solomon: "Hearken unto thy father who begat thee, and despise not thy mother, when she is old. The Apostle says, "Let children learn to shew piety at home, and to requite their parents;" or make them a suitable return, when either poverty, age or infirmity calls for it; "for this is good and acceptable before God." An instance of this filial piety we have in Joseph the governor of Egypt, who, in a time of general famine, sent to his aged father in Canaan, saying, "Come down to me, tarry not—Thou shalt dwell near to me, and I will nourish thee." Another instance we have in David: Persecuted and driven from place to place by the malice of Saul, he felt an anxious concern for his parents, lest the enemy unable to apprehend him, should take vengeance on them: He therefore brings them into the land of Moab, and says to the king, "Let my father and my mother, I pray thee, come forth and be with you, till I know what God will do for me." It was said to Naomi, that Boaz, who had married her daughter, should be "a restorer of her life, and a nourisher



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of her old age." We have a higher example in our divine Saviour, who, on the cross, committed his aged mother to the care of John his beloved disciple. In reproving the scribes for their hypocrisy, our Lord mentions this as a most abominable instance of it, that, under pretence of piety to God, they absolved men from their obligation to support their aged parents." "Ye reject the commandment of God, that ye may keep your own tradition; for Moses said, Honor thy father and mother; but ye teach, that if a man shall say to his father or mother, This is a gift" dedicated to God, "by whatsoever I might profit, or maintain thee, he shall be free from his obligation to do any thing for their support."—Thus says he, "Ye make the word of God, of no effect."

You see, what are the principal duties which you owe to your parents.

For your encouragement in the performance of them, remember, that, to the command, "*Honor* your parents," God has added a promise, "It shall be well with you, and your lives shall be prolonged."

In all your temporal concerns you will enjoy the smiles of his providence; his favor will multiply your days, his blessing will prosper your labors, and his goodness will supply your wants. His eye will be upon you for good; his ear will be open to your prayers; and no good thing will he withhold from you. He will make the pious labors of your parents subservient to your spiritual interest. Trained up by their prudent care, in the way of wisdom, and led along by their counsel and example, you will find the path more and more pleasant and inviting, as you proceed. Strengthened and animated by the power of God's grace, you will repel temptations and triumph over opposition; you will run and not be weary, you will walk and not faint. We proceed,

Secondly. To the other branch of our subject, which is, The duty of parents to their children.—"Ye

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fathers, provoke not your children to wrath; provoke them not, lest they be discouraged; but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." This is agreeable to the wise man's advice, "Train up a child in the way in which he should go." It is illustrated in the example of Abraham, "who commanded his children and his household after him, and they kept the way of the Lord."

Paul well understood human nature; he wisely judged what kind of discipline in a household would be most successful. In both the epistles, in which he treats on family government, he cautions parents not to discourage the hearts, and break the spirits of their children, by provoking their passions. It is a caution, which deserves the attention of all, who are placed at the head of families. In these little societies there must be government, as well as in larger; but it must be a rational, not a passionate—a mild and steady, not a wanton and rigorous government. We must lead and invite our children along in the path of duty by instruction, argument and example, not urge and drive them by force and terror. The former will animate, the latter will discourage them.

The Apostle has a particular regard to the *religious* education of children. This is the proper import of the phrase, "Bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord." By good instruction and example nourish them up in the doctrine of Christ. This is the principal thing: But in connexion with this, there must be also an attention to the nurture of their bodies, and their preparation for business and usefulness in the world.

In all parts of the education, which we bestow upon them, and the government which we exercise over them, we must attend to this caution, "not to provoke, but encourage them."

1. Parents are to *instruct* their children in the doctrines and duties of religion.

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Children come into the world ignorant and uninformed. The principles and rudiments of religion must be gradually implanted in them, as they grow up to a capacity of receiving them. And to whom does it so naturally belong to implant these seeds, as to you, under whose care and authority God has placed *them*? You can best address yourselves to their capacities; you have the most frequent opportunities to converse with them; and their affection for you and confidence in you will give your instructions a peculiar advantage. Therefore God has given it in solemn charge, "that you diligently teach them his laws, and talk of them, when you sit in your houses, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you arise."

This work must be begun early, before their *minds* are warped by corrupt opinions, and hardened by vicious habits. "Whom shall you teach knowledge, and make to understand doctrine?—*Them* who are weaned from the milk and drawn from the breast."

You must gently lead them along from the more plain and easy to the more difficult and sublime truths of religion. "There must be here a little, and there a little." Plunge them not at once into deep mysteries, nor load them too fast with a multitude of precepts, lest they be discouraged. Our Saviour spake the word to the people in parables, as they were able to hear it. He taught the truth to his disciples gradually, as they could bear to receive it. He was careful not to put new wine into old bottles, lest the bottles should burst, and the wine be lost.

Think not that this attention is due to your children only in their first years; continue it as long as they are under your care. "Precept must be upon precept, and line upon line," that they may hear the word of the Lord.

2. Content not yourselves with giving your children good instructions; but endeavor, by arguments, ex-

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hortations and reproofs, to form their lives according to your instructions.

Carefully watch their temper and manners. If you discover in them a vicious propensity, check and restrain it, before it is grown into a habit. Let not parental fondness make you blind to the faults which appear in them, or deaf to all complaints made against them. But to avoid this partiality, you must not run into extreme severities, or unreasonable jealousies.

Ever carry a steady hand, and maintain a temperate discipline.

You may have occasion to use your parental authority; but see that you use it with prudence, moderation and dignity. Give your children tokens of approbation or dislike, as they do well, or ill. But take not severe notice of trivial mistakes and accidental slips; this would discourage them. Neither connive at great and dangerous faults; this would tend to harden them.

Solomon says, "The rod and reproof give wisdom." Hasty reproofs and passionate corrections should be avoided. These bring government into contempt. But then, to avoid rigor, you must not wholly let go the reins of government: A child left to himself, brings himself to ruin and his parents to shame. "David displeased not his son Adonijah, at any time, saying, why hast thou done so?" But the good king had cause to repent of his indulgence, when he saw this son attempt to usurp the kingdom. Small faults, indeed, had better be overlooked entirely, than reproved and punished with sharpness and severity. But where a fault is great in itself, often repeated, or obstinately persisted in, there lenity and connivance become criminal.

Eli, the priest and judge of Israel, used a very unbecoming moderation, when he thus rebuked the scandalous behaviour of his sons; "Why do ye such things? I hear of your evil dealing by all the people;

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nay, my sons, for it is no good report that I hear of you; you make the Lord's people to transgress." God therefore declares, "I will judge the house of Eli for ever, for the iniquity which he knoweth, because his sons made themselves vile and he restrained them not."

Let your discipline be cool and dispassionate, that it may appear to proceed from tender concern, not from wrath and revenge.

Frequent threatenings you must forbear. These weaken authority far more than they deter from iniquity.

Choose the fittest seasons of addressing your children. The Lord's day, an awakening providence, a family affliction and the deaths of young persons, may be improved to give weight and energy to your counsels.

3. Regulate the diversions of your children.

They are not to be excluded from all amusements. Too severe restraints would discourage them. But then be careful, that their recreations are innocent in their nature; that they are well timed; and that they are used with moderation.—Thus they may contribute to health, chearfulness, urbanity and benevolence. Diversions of the opposite description injure the body, corrupt the mind, and vitiate the manners.

Guard your children against the snares of evil company. Restrain them from all intimate society with the profane, the lewd, the intemperate and the scoffers at religion. "He who walketh with wise men, will be wise; but a companion of fools will be destroyed." —"Blessed is he who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful; but he delighteth in the law of the Lord, and therein doth meditate day and night."

4. Maintain the worship of God in your houses. This is a mean of religion: And religion can never flourish where the means of it are neglected.

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The young members of your family will form their sentiments in a great measure from your practice. If you neglect prayer to God, they will easily cast off the fear of him. If they entertain an idea that you are indifferent to religion, your serious exhortations and reproofs will be unfelt and disregarded. Abraham, who commanded his children after him, preserved a sacred intercourse with God. Wherever he pitched his tent, there he erected an altar. It was the resolution of Joshua, that as for him and his house, they would serve the Lord. The Apostle exhorts Christians to "pray always with all prayer." If there are any reasons to worship God at all, there are reasons for family worship. Whoever denies his obligation to this, will naturally discard all forms of devotion. God therefore ranks among the Heathens such families as call not on his name. Every Christian family should be a church, as the Apostle intimates, when he salutes masters of families, and the churches in their respective houses.

Let your domestic worship be maintained steadily, without unnecessary omissions, and performed solemnly, without any appearance of levity. Let it not, however, be protracted to a tedious length, lest it weary the attention and excite a disgust in tender minds; but let it be prudently adapted to the circumstances of the several members of your household, that it may tend to edification, not to discouragement.

5. Let your conversation be exemplary.

It was David's resolution, "I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way; I will walk within my house with a perfect heart; I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes." Happy if you can appeal to your children in the language of the Apostle to the Thessalonians, "Ye are witnesses, how holily, justly and unblameably we have behaved ourselves among you." And to the Philippians, "those things which ye have learned and received, and heard and *seen* in me, do, and the God of peace will be with you."

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Without example, your instructions and reproofs will be languid and inefficacious. They will be heard with inattention, and treated with neglect.

6. Train up your children to diligence in some honest business.

This is not only necessary to their support and usefulness in life, but important in a religious view. *Idleness* is the bane and ruin of the young. It begets an indolence and deadness to every thing great, manly and virtuous, and invites every temptation and vice. "The *devil*, says one, "tempts the active and vigorous into his service, knowing what proper instruments they are to do his drudgery; but the slothful and idle, no body having hired them and set them on work, lie in his way; he stumbles over them, as he goes about. They offer themselves to his service, and, having nothing to do, they even tempt the devil to tempt *them*, and take them in his way."

Be not, however, rigorous in your exactions; bind not on them heavy burdens, lest they be discouraged; but be reasonable in your requirements, allow them proper relaxations, and give them time, and furnish them with means, for the culture of their minds, and for their improvement in useful knowledge.

Finally: Commend your children to God, and to the word of his grace, who is able to bless them, and make them blessings in this world, and to prepare them for, and bring them to an inheritance among them who are sanctified.

Remember, that there is a special promise annexed to the command, which enjoins the reciprocal duties between children and their parents. If you bring them up in the ways of God, and they under your prudent care and influence walk therein, it will be well with them; and in their prosperity you will have a reward. The scripture contains many promises of divine concurrence with parental government, and of the divine blessing on filial obedience. If you wish to see

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your children prosperous in the world, reputable in society and useful to mankind; if you wish to see them virtuous here, to experience their dutiful attention in your declining years, and to entertain the pleasing hope of their eternal felicity in the future world, then bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Abraham commanded his children—God promised that they should keep the way of the Lord, and that he would bring on him and them, the great and good things which he had spoken. Be persuaded then by the commands and promises of God—by your love to your children—by your concern for their earthly comfort and heavenly happiness—by your regard to your own peace, hope and joy—by your obligations to society—by your benevolence to mankind, and particularly to the rising race—by the duty which you owe to God and men—to the present and succeeding generations, that you present your children to God, train them up in his service, and teach them to keep his ways.



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# SERMON XLVI.

## *Duties of Masters and Servants.*

EPHESIANS vi. 5—9.

*Servants, be obedient to them which are your masters, according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart as unto Christ; not with eye service, as men pleasers, but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men; knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free.*

*And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening, knowing that your master also is in heaven, neither is there any respect of persons with him.*

IN the preceding verses the Apostle explains the reciprocal duties of husbands and wives, and of parents and children. In the words now read, he states the mutual obligations of masters and servants. These three sets of duties comprehend all those which result from domestic relations.

Under the name of *servants* he doubtless means to include all those subordinate members of a family, who are not children, whether they be slaves, properly so called, or servants for a term of years.

His enjoining on servants obedience to their masters, implies a concession, that there might be, and

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was then such a relation as master and servant, in Christian, as well as in Heathen and Jewish families.

The law of Moses provided, that a Jew might be sold for the payment of a debt, or for the compensation of an injury done to a neighbor, particularly by theft; and that in case of extreme poverty, one might sell his own children. But, in these cases, the sale was to be made to one of his own nation, not to a stranger; and the servitude was to be only for a limited time, not for life. It was to expire in the next Jubilee; so that it could not continue longer than six years. And the person sold was to be treated with humanity, and kindness; not as a slave, but as a hired servant.

Of the neighboring nations the Jews might purchase slaves. These they might retain in bondage through life, and use as their property, by selling or exchanging them, or by disposing of them to their children.

The Supreme Lord of the Universe, for holy and wise reasons, was pleased to give the Jews a permission to extirpate the nations of Canaan; at least such of them as would not accept conditions of peace, and submit to become tributaries. And as it was a common usage among those nations to make slaves of captives taken in war, God allowed the Jews to purchase slaves of them. But the particular permission given to the Jews, is not a general warrant for us to do the same; any more than the leave granted them to dispossess the Canaanites, is a warrant for us to dispossess all Heathens, Infidels and Heretics, who are inferior to us in power. Men have their natural rights, independently of their religous character; and we may no more invade the rights of Heathens, than they may invade ours. Religion makes no alteration in men's civil or natural relations and obligations.

There are, however, certain cases, in which men may rightfully be deprived of their natural liberty for a time, or for life. The Apostle says, "Let every man abide in the calling wherein he is called. Art thou

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called, being a servant, care not for it; but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather." He concedes, that liberty is desirable, and what every man ought to choose. But if he cannot innocently obtain it, he must patiently endure the want of it. When he gives instructions to masters how to treat their servants, he supposes, that it may, in some cases, be right for Christians to have servants, otherwise he would have ordered those who had servants immediately to dismiss them. When he explains the duties of servants, he signifies, that such as could not innocently obtain their freedom, should contentedly remain in servitude. When Onesimus deserted his master, and in his absence became a Christian, Paul, far from justifying his desertion, sent him back to his master.

There is a natural subjection, which children owe to their parents, and though neither reason nor scripture fixes any certain period, when this subjection should terminate; yet, in general, it is plain, that the subjection ought to continue to that time of life, when children are usually capable of supporting and governing themselves. And because they are not competent judges for themselves in this matter, the civil authority, in most societies, fixes the age, at which they shall be at their own disposal.

As parents are to provide for their children, so they are to judge, by what ways and means they best can do it. And whenever they think proper, they have an undoubted right to put their children under the care of others. This is only to transfer their own authority for their children's benefits.

Excepting the case of parental authority, or guardianship which comes in its place, I do not conceive that any can rightfully be made servants, but either with their own consent, or for some criminal action by which they forfeited their liberty.

A man may, no doubt, alienate to another his natural liberty by contract for a limited time, when he appre-

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bends this will be for his own benefit and advantage. And such a contract he is bound to fulfil, as much as any other.

Societies have a right to make laws for the common safety; and to annex such sanctions, as are necessary to give efficacy to their laws. If certain crimes may be punished with death, as seems generally to be supposed; others may clearly be punished with the deprivation of liberty for a time, or for life. And if a man, by any crime, incurs the loss of liberty, he may rightfully be held in servitude. But to take away one's natural liberty by force, without a forfeiture on his part, is as unjustifiable, as to take away his property, or his life. By the divine law, the stealing of a man to sell him for a slave, was to be punished with death.

It being admitted that there may be in families such a relation as master and servant, let us attend to the duties which belong to it.

We will, first, consider the duties of servants, with the encouragement subjoined.

1. They are "to be *obedient* to their masters—to *obey* them in all things."

This must be understood with the same limitation, as all other commands enjoining relative duties. We are to "obey God rather than men." Our first obligations are to *him;* and only in those things which he allows can we owe subjection to them. No human authority can bind us in opposition to the laws of virtue and righteousness. Servants must "be obedient to their masters, as to Christ, doing the will of God from the heart." They no farther obey their masters, according to the will of God, than they make his will the rule and measure of their obedience to their masters. They have no right to withhold obedience, on pretence that the matter enjoined may not be for their master's interest. But they are bound to withhold it, when they know the thing required is contrary to God's command.

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2. Servants owe their masters *reverence*, as well as obedience.

The Apostle says to them, "Obey your masters with *fear* and *trembling*." Entertain a respect for the superiority of their station—a concern, lest you prejudice their interest—a fear lest you incur their displeasure. Do nothing unnecessarily to provoke them—adjust your manners to their inclination; and, as far as innocence will allow, please them well in all things. The Apostle Peter gives similar advice, "Be *subject* to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but to the froward." If they are men of hasty and difficult tempers, then conduct toward them with the greater caution and prudence. Never disturb them needlessly, nor irritate them wantonly; but by your easy, accommodating and discreet carriage, soften the harshness, and smoothe the ruggedness of their spirits.

3. From servants there is an *honor*, as well as *fear*, due to their masters.

"Let as many servants as are under the yoke, count their own masters worthy of *all honor*, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed;" or that the gospel be not reproached among infidels, as if it encouraged the insolence of servants. "And *they who* have *believing* masters, let them not despise them," or treat them as if they were but equals, "because they are brethren" in the Christian relation; for this dissolves not men's natural and civil relations; "but rather let them do service" to such masters the more cheerfully, "because they are faithful and beloved."

Servants must not only treat their masters respectfully in their presence, but be tender of their honor and reputation at all times—not speaking evil of them—not reporting every instance of misconduct which they observe in the family—not complaining of the government which they are under, unless the occasion be ur-

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gent; and then, only to those from whom they are to expect redress.

4. *Cheerfulness* in their obedience is recommended by the Apostle. "With *good will* do service." "Be obedient to your masters—please them well in all things, not answering again," not murmuring, objecting and cavilling; but acting with a ready mind.

5. *Diligence* or faithfulness is another duty which they owe to their master.

They should consider his business as their own; and act in it with the same attention and care, as if they were immediately interested. They should serve him "with singleness of heart, not with eye service"—and "with all good fidelity," "not purloining" his property, neglecting his business, or doing his work deceitfully.

6. They are to be *patient* and *submissive*, though they meet with usage more severe than they think reasonable; not breaking their own obligations, or deserting their master's service for trivial causes, but bearing his smaller indiscretions, without complaint; and, in cases of real injury, seeking relief in a prudent manner, and by lawful means. "Be subject to the froward," says the Apostle, "as well as the good and gentle."—"Let every man abide in the calling wherein he is called. Art thou called being a servant, care not for it; but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather."

Finally: In all their service, they should act with an aim to please God, and to obtain his approbation. "Be obedient to your masters as to Christ—with good will do service, as to the Lord, and not to men."

A regard to God is to be the governing principle in all the duties of the social life, as well as in those of piety. Even the servant is, on this principle, to obey his master. When this governs us, then our secular, domestic and civil duties, become a part of pure and undefiled religion.

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By way of encouragement to servants, the Apostle says, "with good will do service as to the Lord, and not to men, knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free." In Christ Jesus there is no distinction of bond or free, rich or poor: They are all one in him.

Mankind are called to serve God in various stations and capacities. Some act in a larger, and some in a narrower sphere. Some are appointed to higher, and some to humbler services. But all are the servants of God; all are accountable to him; all should walk, not as pleasing men, but God who searcheth the heart. We esteem and regard our fellow men very much according to external distinctions of rank and fortune. God looks on their hearts—he approves or condemns them according to the difference of real characters. The servant, who from the heart *does God's will*, and acts with fidelity and diligence in his *humble station*, aiming in all things to please the Supreme Lord, and in obedience to him, serving his earthly master, and hoping for acceptance through the atonement of the great redeemer, this man is as highly approved, *and* will be as surely rewarded in heaven, as if he had acted on the most conspicuous theatre, or moved *in the* largest circle. Our future happiness depends not on external circumstances, but on the holy dispositions and tempers of the hidden man of the heart. While the unbelieving master, or the impious monarch, is rejected of God; the believing servant, who acts in singleness of heart to the Lord; the humble and contented beggar, rich in faith, shall receive of the Lord an inheritance in the kingdom prepared for them who love him.

*Secondly.* We pass now to consider the duty of masters to their servants. The Apostle says, "Ye masters, do the same things to them."—Shew to them the same benevolence and faithfulness in your place, as

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they, in theirs, are required to shew to you. "Forbear threatening." Let your government be mild and prudent; not passionate and severe. "And know, that your master also is in heaven;" and to him you must give an account of your conduct toward servants, as well as they of their conduct toward you; "And there is no respect of persons with him."

In the epistle to the Colossians, this precept is thus expressed: "Masters give unto your servants that which is just and equal, knowing that ye also have a master in heaven."

The terms, *justice* and *equity*, are often used in the same sense; but sometimes they express different ideas. To give a servant that which is *just*, is to deal with him according to contract or agreement. To give him that which is *equal*, is to treat him fairly, honestly, kindly, according to reason and conscience; whether we are bound by an explicit bargain or not. And as there are different sorts of servants, so these two terms are chosen to express all that variety of obligations, which we may be under to them, according to their various conditions.

With respect to *apprentices*, the contract binds the master not only to give them a comfortable support, or such part of it as the contract specifies, but also to instruct them in his business and profession. They give their time and labor for his art and skill. If he withholds from them that skill for which they agree to serve him; or conceals from them any part of it through negligence or design; or employs them in other business so far, that they have not opportunity to acquire the necessary knowledge of his art, he is guilty of injustice and fraud. He violates the engagement which he made either expressly, or according to the natural understanding of the parties.

With respect to *laborers*, who in scripture are called hired servants, justice obliges us to give them the stipulated wages, when they have faithfully performed the



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promised service. Thus it is enjoined in the law of Moses. "Thou shalt not oppress the hired servant that is poor and needy, whether he be of thy brethren, or of the strangers that are within thy gates; at his day shalt thou give him his hire, (for he is poor, and setteth his heart upon it) lest he cry against thee to the Lord, and it be sin unto thee."

And with respect to all servants of every denomination, *equity* requires, that we treat them with humanity and kindness—that we endeavor to make their service easy, and their condition comfortable, that we forbear rash and passionate language—that we overlook accidental errors, and remit trivial faults—that we impose only such labor as is reasonable in itself, and suitable to their capacity—that our reproofs be calm, and our counsels well timed—that the restraints we lay upon them be prudent and salutary—that we allow them reasonable time for rest and refreshment, for the culture of their minds, and for attendance on the worship of God—that we set before them a virtuous example, instil into them useful principles, warn them against wickedness of every kind, especially against the sin which most easily besets them—that we afford them opportunity for reading and private devotion, and furnish them with the necessary means of learning the way of salvation—that we attend to the preservation of their health, and have compassion on them in sickness; and, in a word, that we contribute all proper assistance to render them useful, virtuous and happy.

These are the principal duties comprised in the Apostle's direction, "Ye masters do the same things —and give to your servants that which is just and equal."

To engage the master in the performance of these duties, let him consider, that whatever worldly distinction there may be between him and those who serve him, they are men as well as he; they are partakers of the same rational nature, and of the same flesh and

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blood; they are creatures of the same God, and under the care of the same Providence. Job felt the force of this argument. "If I despised the cause of my man-servant, or of my maidservant, when they contended with me, what shall I do when God riseth up? And when he visiteth, what shall I answer him? Did not he that made me in the womb, make him? And did not one fashion us both?

Let the master also consider, that he himself has a master in heaven, with whom there is no respect of persons; to whom bond and free are both alike; to whom the servant is as dear as the master; by whom all will be judged with the same impartiality; and from whom each will receive according to his works.

Let him remember, that his heavenly master, when he was on earth, took on him the form of a servant, and was among his own disciples as one who served; that he honored the lowest conditions in life by appearing in them, and recommended humility, meekness and condescension by his own example; that nothing can raise men to his favor, but pure and undissembled religion; that with this the lowest of the human race are truly honorable—without it the highest are vile and contemptible.

Let us learn then to disregard worldly distinctions, and be solicitous to possess the temper of Christ's divine religion. This teaches us how to behave in every condition—this affords support in every trouble—this will give patience and fortitude in every trial—this will enable us to close life with hope and joy.

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# SERMON XLVII.

## *The Christian Warfare.*

EPHESIANS vi. 10——17.

*Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood; but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness, and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace, and above all taking the shield of faith wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked, and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.*

THE Apostle, having stated the doctrines and duties of the Christian religion and proved its truth and importance, subjoins this animated exhortation to constancy and perseverence in it, whatever opposition might arise either from flesh and blood, or from the powers of the kingdom of darkness.

The words now read contain.

An exhortation to *fortitude*—a warning of the *enemies* to be opposed—and a description of the *armor* to be used.

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I. Here is an exhortation to *Christian Fortitude.*

"Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might."

It is not bodily, but *mental* strength, which is here intended; for this only can be employed in a warfare with spiritual enemies. We are to be strong *in the Lord*, or in the belief, profession and practice of his religion—and in the power of *his might*, or in the grace which is derived from him. We are to "stand fast in the faith, quit ourselves like men and be strong."

True fortitude or courage is a temper or habit of mind, by which we steadily follow the calls of duty, without being deterred by danger, or diverted by difficulty.

It supposes some *opposition* to contend with. In easy duties we may be obedient; but we discover greatness of mind and strength of virtue only in cases which require selfdenial.

This also supposes an *apprehension* of difficulty. Thus it is distinguished from stupidity, which rushes into danger only because it is blind and thoughtless.

Christian courage is employed in things *virtuous* and *commendable.* In this respect it differs from *fool hardiness*, which is guided by no principle, but runs into danger through vanity and ostentation.

Real fortitude is a *settled* and *habitual temper*, in distinction from those starts of resolution, and flights of zeal, which depend on passion, accident, or some mechanical cause.

It is a virtue founded in a *regard* to *God*, and supported by *faith* in *him.* Thus it is distinguished from that madness of courage, which is excited by resentment, ambition, avarice and lust; and from that daring contempt and defiance of danger or death, which sometimes attend atheism, and infidelity.

It is always to be under the direction of that *prudence*, which shuns danger when it may, and meets evil only in the path where duty calls.

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That our courage may be a virtue, it must have a *worthy object.* "It is good to be zealously affected in a good thing." And "no man is crowned, except he strive lawfully."

Our engagedness should be proportioned to the *importance* of the object.

For the faith delivered to the saints we must contend earnestly. In matters of indifference or mere expedience, we must be gentle and easy to be entreated.

Courage must pursue its end only by *lawful means.* Peter was bold to draw his sword in his master's defence; but his boldness was rebuked, because it seized an instrument never to be used in Christ's kingdom.

Christian fortitude is cool and deliberate, not rash and impetuous: It is kind and compassionate, not cruel and revengeful: It is steady and patient, not fickle and inconstant: It continues in well doing, persuaded that its labor is not in vain.

II. The Apostle warns the Ephesians *of the enemies* with whom they might expect to contend.—"Be strong—that ye may stand against the wiles of the devil; for we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this world and spiritual wickedness in high places."

It is common in scripture to express a *disparity* between two objects by a rejection of the less. The prophet says, "God will have mercy, and not sacrifice;" or rather than sacrifice. Our Saviour says, "Labor not for the meat which perisheth, but for that which endureth to everlasting life." Labor for the latter principally. Paul says "Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel;" to do the latter rather than the former. Thus we are to understand the expression in the text, "We wrestle not," merely "against flesh and blood, but" also "against principalities and powers."

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*Flesh* is often used figuratively for that which is *weak*. The prophet says, "Cursed be the man who maketh *flesh* his arm;" or trusts in an *impotent* creature, "and departeth from the Lord." The Apostle says, "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal," not *weak*, "but mighty through God."—And this seems to be the sense of the word here: We wrestle not merely against feeble enemies, but against such as are strong and formidable.

The Apostle mentions two sorts of enemies.

1. The first he calls *flesh* and *blood*.

Under this denomination several things are comprehended.

It may intend the motions of our *animal* nature. Thus the phrase is used, when it is said, "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God."

Human nature consists of flesh and Spirit. From their union arise many appetites and inclinations, for which in unbodied spirits there will be no room. By the apostasy the flesh has gained a dominion over the spirit. Hence wicked men are described as being in, and walking after the *flesh*; and true Christians as being in, and walking after the *Spirit*. The renewed Christian, though he is recovered from the dominion, is not entirely freed from the influence of the flesh. "He delights in the law of the Lord after the inward man; but still he finds in his members a law which wars against the law of his mind." He has need therefore to restrain inordinate affection and to keep under his body.

The phrase may farther intend those *sensible objects*, which are suited to gratify fleshly desires. "They who are in the flesh, mind the things of the flesh;" worldly objects, riches, honors and pleasures. The Christian must not only subdue his fleshly lusts, but guard against the ensnaring influence of earthly things, and keep himself unspotted from the pollutions, and disentangled from the distractions of the world. There

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is a regard which he owes to the interests of the present life; but he must not regard them beyond their importance. He is to be diligent in his worldly calling, but not overcharged with worldly cares.

The phrase may intend *mankind* who are partakers of *flesh and blood.* In this sense it is often used. When Peter professed his faith in Christ, his Lord replied," " Flesh and blood," or man, " hath not revealed this unto thee; but my Father who is in heaven." Paul says, " When God revealed his Son in me, immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood, nor went I up to them, who were Apostle's before me." If we so understand the phrase here, the meaning will be, that we must not conform to the evil customs and manners of the men of the world, but prove *what is* acceptable to God—that we must walk, not as pleasing men, but God who searcheth *the heart*—that we must maintain our faith and integrity, whatever *reproaches* or persecutions we may suffer, esteeming it a small thing to be judged of man's judgment, since he who will finally judge us is the Lord.

2. The other kind of enemies with whom we are to contend are *evil spirits.*

These the Apostle calls " principalities and powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this world," or of this age of superstition and ignorance, " and spiritual wickedness in high places," or in heavenly places, those aerial regions, which evil spirits inhabit. Hence the devil is called " the prince of the power of the air." By the names here used the fallen angels are in scripture often called.

These spirits are enemies to mankind. " They go about seeking whom they may destroy." They work most powerfully in the children of disobedience; but even good men are not secure from their machinations. Christ warns his disciples, that " Satan had desired to have them, that he might sift them as wheat."

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The various denominations here bestowed on them, import that their number is great; and the terms used denote a subordination among them. They are not divided against themselves, but act in concert under the direction of one leading spirit, who is called the Devil and Satan, the god of this world and the prince of darkness. Hence we read of the devil and his angels, and the prince of the power of the air.

The names applied to them signify, that they have great power over such as submit to their dominion.

"They work in the children of disobedience, and lead them captive at their will."

The Apostle speaks of "the *wiles* of the devil." These wicked spirits use much art and cunning to decoy men into error and vice. We need to be apprised of their devices, lest they should get an advantage against us.

They carry on their machinations *secretly*. Hence they are called "powers of darkness." Their chief influence is over the ignorant and superstitious, over people of little knowledge, weak understanding and strong imagination. They most successfully carry on their designs in the dark: They cannot bear the strong beams of light: When the gospel began to shine, Satan began to fall. Among those who reject the gospel, he recovers his full dominion.

Since such enemies are watching for our destruction —enemies numerous, powerful, crafty, invisible and malignant, let us be sober and vigilant, cautious and circumspect, and let us assume immediately, and wear continually the whole armor of God, that we may stand in the evil day. We proceed,

III. To illustrate the description, which the Apostle gives of this divine armor.

The several parts of it mentioned in our text, are truth, righteousness, peace, faith, hope and knowledge.

We are *to take to us* this armor. The armor is God's; but we must *take* and *use* it. Our security



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against temptations depends on the grace of God: Our enjoyment of this grace depends on our application of the means afforded us.

We must take, not this or that piece, but the *whole* armor—not content ourselves with the observance of particular duties, or with the partial practice of religion; but possess the *whole* Christian temper and abound in *every* good work.

We must stand in the *evil day*—in the times which are most perilous and trying—in the times when the rulers of darkness muster their armies against the friends of truth. Such was the day when Paul wrote this epistle. It was a day of persecution—he himself was then in bonds. Godly sincerity is best proved by a steady adherence to the cause of Christ in times when it is attended with peculiar dangers.

"Having done all," or overcome all, still "we must stand." When we have *prevailed in* one conflict, we must not put off the harness, as *if our warfare* were accomplished; but still wear our armor and stand prepared for another assault. "When the devil has ended his temptation, he departs," but it is only "for a season."

The armor is before us, let us take and use it.

1. The Apostle says, "Stand, having *your loins* girt about with *truth*." He alludes to the custom of the eastern nations, who, wearing loose and flowing robes, girded them about their loins, that they might not be entangled with them. This was in soldiers a necessary preparation for action. To this custom David alludes; "Thou hast girded me with strength to the battle." Paul borrows the metaphor from Isaiah, who, speaking of the Messiah, says, "Righteousness shall be the girdle of his loins, and faithfulness the girdle of his reins." Peter uses the same figure; "Gird up the loins of your mind."

Truth is the girdle with which our loins must be braced. By *truth* is intended *sincerity* in our Christ-

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ian profession, or a firm belief of, and full consent to the gospel of Christ. If we receive the gospel on the authority of man, without a persuasion in our own minds; or if we profess it for worldly ends, without a love of its doctrines and precepts, we shall easily be drawn away from it by the temptations of the world and the artifice of designing men. A rational conviction of its truth, joined with a deep sense of its importance, is our best security against apostasy in the evil day.

2. "Have on the breastplate of *righteousness*." This expression is also taken from Isaiah, who, speaking of God's judgment on the enemies of the church, says, "He put on righteousness as a breastplate."

Here is an allusion to the ancient custom of soldiers, who, when they were going to battle, guarded the vital part with a plate of iron or brass, or some other impenetrable substance.

The breastplate of the Christian warrior must be *righteousness*. This is St. Peter's advice; "Let them who suffer according to the will of God, commit the keeping of their souls to him in *well doing*, as to a faithful Creator."—"The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous; and his ears are open to their prayers—and who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good? But if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are you.—It is better to suffer for well doing, than for evil doing." A holy and inoffensive life will prevent many injuries. It will command the reverence of bad, and the compassion of good men. It will obtain the protection of God's Providence and the supports of his grace. It will preserve peace and serenity of conscience under the reproaches of a malignant world.

3. "Let your *feet* be *shod* with the preparation of the gospel of *peace*.

Shoes were anciently a part of military armor. The giant of Gath "had greaves of brass upon his legs." —"To be shod," is to be in readiness for action,

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The Israelites in Egypt were to eat the passover, "with their shoes on their feet," prepared to march at the first notice. The Apostles were to be "shod with sandals," ready to go whither their master should send them. The gospel is called, "the gospel of peace," because it expressly requires, and strongly recommends a peaceable, meek, forgiving temper. "*If* it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." This peaceable disposition is a happy "preparation" for the trials of an evil day, and an excellent defence against the asperities of our Christian path. This will go on before us to smooth the rough passages of life, or attend us to guard our feet against the sticks and traps which our enemies cast in our way. Possessed of this disposition, we shall give no offence and provoke no injuries by an insolent overbearing behavior; the injuries, which we receive, we shall bear with calmness; we shall neither aggravate the pain of them by undue resentment, nor cause the *repetition* of them by hasty revenge; we shall not be overcome of evil, but shall overcome evil with good. This temper is our best security against the temptations of evil spirits; for it is by means of our turbulent and unruly passions, that they gain access to our minds—it is by the indulgence of pride, wrath, malice and revenge, that we give place to them. By the wisdom which is pure, gentle and peaceable, we resist the devil and expel him from us. The peace of God ruling within us, will keep our hearts and minds through Jesus Christ. Thus secured the wicked one will not touch us. "Be wise to that which is good, and simple concerning evil, and the God of peace will tread Satan under your feet."

4. "Above all things take the *shield of faith*, whereby ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked"

A shield is a piece of light armor, made of firm wood or hard skin, and sometimes of metal, which sol-

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diers anciently used in battle to defend themselves against the spears and darts of their enemies. In handling it they were so expert, that they could usually guard any part of the body, at which a pass was made. In allusion to this, the Apostle directs Christians, not only to gird the loins with truth, defend the breast with righteousness, and secure the feet with the sandals of peace; but to assume the *shield of faith*, an instrument of more general defence, by which they will repel *all* the fiery darts of the wicked one. This we are to take *above all things*. Faith is a grace of universal influence. It is the basis of all Christian graces. It is the ground work of religion in the heart. On this we must build ourselves up, adding to it all other virtues.

This is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. This purifies the heart and quickens to obedience. This unites the soul to Christ, and embraces the promises of God in him. This looks to God as a present help in trouble, and relies on the Holy Spirit for support in the time of need. It contemplates with joy the captain of salvation, who has overcome the world, and triumphed over principalities and powers. It considers him, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, and is now set down on the right hand of God, and who has graciously promised, that they who overcome shall sit with him on his throne.

Faith thus operating is a more effectual defence against the temptations of Satan and the world, than the shields of the mighty against the darts and spears of their enemies.

5. "Take the *helmet of salvation*."

Or, as it is expressed elsewhere, "put on for an helmet the hope of salvation." The expression is taken from Isaiah, who, speaking of the Almighty dressed in arms to subdue his enemies, says, "He put on righteousness as a breastplate, and a helmet of salvation was on his head." God brings salvation. We appropriate it by hope. This is our helmet.

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The use of the helmet is to secure the head in the day of battle. It was of special utility in former times, when armies met and disputed the ground sword in hand. In the Christian warfare, not a helmet of brass, but the hope of salvation, must be the defence. We must fight the good fight of faith in hope that the captain of salvation will support us in the conflict and lead us to victory. We must endure temptations in hope of a crown of glory—continue in well doing in hope of eternal life—abound in the work of the Lord in hope that our labor is not in vain. In the clear view of a future world, and in the full expectation of a blessed immortality, what difficulty can discourage us—what temptation can divert us—what danger can deter us from the religious life? "Our present light affliction, which is but for a moment, will work for us a far more exceeding and an eternal weight of glory."

6. "Take the *Sword of the Spirit* which is the word of God."

The former pieces of armor were for defence;—This is for annoyance, as well as defence. The divine word is called "the sword of the Spirit," either because it is a spiritual weapon adapted to the religious warfare, in distinction from the carnal weapons used in the literal warfare; or because it is an instrument rendered effectual by the Spirit to slay the fleshly lusts and repel the outward temptations which war against the soul. "The word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of the soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intentions of the heart." This was the weapon which our Lord used in his conflict with Satan. In his hands it was effectual: By his aid it will be effectual in ours.

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## REFLECTIONS.

1. We see of what importance it is that we have the power of religion in our hearts. It is only by this, that we become strong in the Lord. The whole armor of God consists in truth, righteousness, peace, faith, hope, and the word of God dwelling in us. Real religion is the principle of true courage. Let us have root in ourselves, and be grounded and established in the faith. We may without sincerity assume the form of religion; but without sincerity we shall easily drop the form which we have assumed. The hypocrite will be put out of countenance by those scoffs and reproaches, which only warm the zeal, and strengthen the resolution of the real Christian.

2. It concerns us to live much in the exercise of faith. This is the great principle of Christian fortitude. "Add to your faith virtue." It is a main implement in the spiritual armor. "Above all things take the shield of faith." He that is strong in faith, will be stedfast in religion. When Paul suffered in the cause of Christ, he professed, that he was not ashamed, because he knew whom he had believed.

3. Let us exercise our courage according to the various exigencies of the Christian life.

It requires much resolution to subdue our corrupt inclinations, restrain our irregular passions and follow the dictates of religion, when interest, custom and reputation seem to prescribe a different line of conduct.

There is need of fortitude that we may openly profess and steadily practice religion, when it is treated with ridicule and contempt by those with whom we are connected.

The young convert has occasion for courage that he may break off his intimacy with ungodly associates, and say to them, "Depart from me, for I will keep the commandments of God."

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The young householder, dwelling in an irreligious neighborhood, and among those who make a mock of family devotion, needs resolution, that he may say with Joshua, "If it seem evil to you to serve the Lord, choose ye, this day, whom ye will serve: But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

It is a work of courage to begin and carry on a reformation in families and neighborhoods, to oppose error and vice, and patronize truth and virtue, when the general voice is against us.

It requires resolution to vindicate an injured character, and plead in defence of oppressed innocence, when it is become an object of common slander and obloquy.

There is need of fortitude to persevere in well doing against all the oppositions and discouragements, which may meet us in our way.

So many and various are the calls for Christian fortitude, that every one who enters on *the religious* life, should set out with it, and in his progress *often* contemplate those truths which may increase and strengthen it.

To conclude: As we have engaged in the service of Christ, let us be faithful to the death. Enemies we have to conflict with; but let us not fear: Greater is he who is with us, than they who are in *the world.* Let us put on his armor, go forth in his name, obey his orders, strive lawfully, be sober and vigilant, endure hardness as good soldiers, rely for support on him who has called us, quit ourselves like men and be strong: Thus we shall overcome, and inherit all things.

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# SERMON XLVIII.

## *Prayer and Intercession.*

EPHESIANS vi. 18, 19, 20.

*Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance, and supplication for all saints; and for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, for which I am an ambassador in bonds, that therein I may speak boldly as I ought to speak.*

OUR vigor and activity in the use of the divine armor, described in the preceding verses, depend on the constant energy and support of God's grace. Therefore with the use of this armor the Apostle exhorts us to join vigilant, sincere and persevering prayer. His instructions on this subject are contained in the words now read, which I shall open to you in several observations.

I. The Apostle here supposes our *obligation to prayer* to be so plain, that every rational mind will see it, and so important, that every pious heart will feel it. Therefore, instead of adducing arguments to prove the duty, he rather points out the manner in which it should be performed.

Our obligation to prayer naturally results from our weakness and dependence, and God's allsufficiency and



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goodness. We feel our wants and our inability to supply them; and we see the impotence of the creatures around us. If then we believe there is an invisible Being, infinite in power, wisdom and goodness, always present with us and exercising a continual providence over us, it is obviously reasonable to direct our desires to him. And desires directed to him are prayer.

To clothe our desires in language is not essential to prayer. God hears the *desire* of the humble. But as we are accustomed to the use of language in communicating our thoughts to one another, we naturally fall into the use of it, in directing our desires to God. In *social* prayer this is necessary, that we may with one mind glorify the Father. And in our *secret* devotions a kind of silent language usually accompanies the sentiments of our hearts. This assists us to fix our attention, arrange our thoughts and enliven our affections. Creatures organized as we are, and accustomed to the use of words in their intercourse with one another, cannot easily frame a mental prayer without something like verbal expressions.

"But if God is powerful, wise and good, what need of any prayer? Will he not do for us what is best without our solicitation?"

As well may you ask, "What need is there of diligence in our calling? Cannot God by his own omnipotence supply our wants without our help?" He has given us powers, and he requires us to use them. And there is the same reason for daily prayer, as for daily labor. We are dependent on God, and we know this dependence; and it is as reasonable that we should express our sense of dependence by prayer, as that we should express our sense of want by labor. If we have desires, to whom shall we direct them, but to him who can supply all our need?

Prayer is a mean of enlivening our pious sentiments and exciting us to the practice of duty, and thus of preparing us to receive divine favors. In short, it is

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founded in the same reasons, as love to God, the fear of him and trust in him. It is founded in his perfections and providence, and our relation to him and dependence on him. And you may as well ask, what reason there is to love, fear and trust God, as what reason there is to praise him and pray to him. The former is the temper of a pious soul; the latter is the exercise and expression of that temper. We may observe,

II. Prayer is of several *kinds*, social and secret, public and domestic, stated and occasional: And it consists of several *parts*, confession, supplication, intercession and thanksgiving. The Apostle here points out no part or kind of prayer in distinction from all others, but exhorts us in general to pray with *all* prayer.

He seems, however, to have a more special regard to *domestic* or *family* prayer. He had just been treating on the relative duties, as those between husband and wife, parent and children, master and servants; and the exhortation to prayer, immediately subjoined, may most naturally be understood as respecting that social exercise of devotion which families should maintain.

Family prayer was a usage observed by the ancient patriarchs, by pious Jews and by the early Christians. It was a practice well known in the Apostle's day. The expression, therefore, "Pray with *all* prayer," must include *this*.

Among the Jews there was a daily sacrifice, offered part in the morning, and part in the evening. This was called "the *continual* sacrifice." The hours of this sacrifice were considered as "hours of *prayer*." In allusion to *this*, the Apostle directs Christians to "pray *without ceasing*," and to "offer the sacrifice of praise *continually*." These words therefore, "Pray *always* with *all prayer*," clearly and strongly enjoin on families the stated maintenance of *morning* and *evening* prayer.

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III. The Apostle next instructs us concerning the *manner* in which our prayers should be offered. "Pray with all prayer and supplication *in the spirit*, and *watch* thereunto with all *perseverance*."

The spirit and temper of the heart in our prayers, is the main thing necessary to qualify them for God's acceptance. Those hypocrites, who draw near to him with their lips, while their hearts are far from him, worship him in vain.

The first thing necessary in prayer is *faith*, or a believing view of God's providential government, and of the wisdom and goodness with which it is administered. "Without this faith it is impossible to please him." And as he has appointed a Mediator through whom we, unworthy creatures, may approach his throne, all our prayers must be presented to him in the name of this Mediator. Our spiritual sacrifices are acceptable to God through Jesus *Christ*; and whatever we do in word or deed, we must do all in *his* name.

Our desires must be good and reasonable. "This is the confidence which we have in God, that if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us; and if we know that he heareth us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him." There are some, "who ask and receive not." And the reason is, "They ask amiss, that they may consume it on their lusts."

*Attention* of mind, *collection* of thought and *warmth* of affection, are qualifications required in prayer. These are implied in our *watching* unto prayer—in our attending upon God *without distraction*—in our *engaging the heart* to approach him—in our praying with the *Spirit*, and with a *fervent* spirit.

We must serve God with *reverence* and *godly fear*; for "he is greatly to be feared in the assembly of his saints, and to be had in reverence of all that are about him." "We must not be rash with our mouth, nor hasty to utter any thing before him, for he is in heaven,

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and we upon earth." "He humbles himself to behold the things which are in heaven." "The angels vail their faces before him." What are we, that he should be mindful of us?—He is high, but he has respect to the lowly, and gives grace to the humble.

That our prayers may be acceptable to God, they must be accompanied with *justice* to men. God says to the Jews, "When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes; when ye make many prayers, I will not hear; for your hands are full of blood. Wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings." Of the Pharisees, "who made long prayers, and devoured widows' houses," Christ says, "they shall receive greater damnation."

*Charity* is an essential qualification in prayer. "When ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any man, that your heavenly Father may forgive you." "Be sober and watch unto prayer, and above all things have fervent charity among yourselves."

We must bring before the throne of God a *meek* and *peaceable* Spirit. This is the direction of the gospel: "Be likeminded one toward another, that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God—study the things which make for peace—and receive ye one another, as Christ hath received us."

Our prayers must be accompanied with a *sense* of, and *sorrow* for sin. For "if we regard iniquity in our heart, the Lord will not hear us." "The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open to their cry; but his face is against them who do evil. He is nigh to them who are of a broken heart; but evil shall slay the wicked."

We are to "*continue* in prayer, and watch thereunto with all *perseverance*"—"to pray always and not to faint." It is "by *faith* and *patience* that we receive the promises." In our prayers for pardon, grace and glory, we may adopt the language of the patriarch; "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." We

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are to "seek until we find." Our prayers for temporal benefits, however importunate, should be accompanied with submission to the unknown will of God, and to his perfect wisdom, which can judge for us better than we can judge for ourselves. In prayer Christ has taught us to say, "Our Father—thy will be done." I proceed to observe,

IV. The Apostle here teaches us the duty of *intercession* for others. "Pray—with supplication for all saints, and for me——."

The goodness of God is the foundation of prayer. If God is good to others, as well as to us, there is the same ground on which to offer our social intercessions, as our personal petitions. The acceptableness of prayer much depends on our real desires of the things for which we pray. Intercession is therefore the most excellent part of prayer, because it is the most remote from selfishness, and implies the greatest degree of charity and disinterestedness. It is an expression of our desire for the happiness of others.

Good will to men is a necessary qualification in our prayers for personal blessings; and prayers dictated purely by this principle are peculiarly acceptable to God.

Some will ask, "What reason is there why we should pray for others? Will not God do good to men without our importunity?"

This question is the same as if you should ask, "What reason is there, why we should love our neighbors? If you ought to love them, you ought to desire and seek their good; and if you believe, they are dependent on God for the blessings which they need, then you ought, in their behalf, to direct your desires and make your requests to him."

Yea, you may as well ask, "What occasion is there for alms to the poor, instruction to the ignorant, or relief to the afflicted?" God can feed the hungry, guide the simple and comfort the sorrowful without our good

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offices, as well as without our prayers: And the success of our works of charity, as well as of our prayers, depends on his favor.

The truth is, God is good to all, and he exercises his goodness in such a manner as his wisdom sees best. Benevolence is an important virtue; and God has placed us in a connexion with each other, that there may be occasion for the frequent operations of it. He requires us to do good as we have opportunity. Without a disposition to do good, our prayers are vain, for they are not sincere. Where this disposition exists, it will operate both in works of beneficence, and in friendly intercessions. The moral government of God is a system of benevolence; and he so administers it, as to encourage mutual benevolence among his subjects.

We are not to imagine, however, that he will withhold from good men, the blessings for which they are prepared, merely because others neglect to pray for them. But if he grants to unworthy creatures the favors to which they have no claim, this certainly is an act of grace; and it is not the less grace, because he grants them on the intercession of others.

We are commanded to pray for *all men*. We can by direct acts of beneficence do good only to few; but our charitable wishes may embrace millions, even distant nations and unborn generations. By the example and precepts of Christ we are taught to "love our enemies, and pray for those who despitefully use us."

If such are subjects of our prayers, none are to be excluded.

As we cannot have a distinct knowledge of the cases of all men, our prayers for them must be general, "that they may be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth."

The *general* state of mankind is well known. Many nations are in the darkness of Heathenism—many are deluded by vain imposture—many are misled by a cor-

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rupted Christianity—among those who enjoy the pure gospel many are blinded by the god of this world. A great part of the human race are under the power of an arbitrary domination, and employed in butchering one another, merely to gratify the pride of wanton tyrants. Among the millions, who are impelled to assume the instruments of death, and spread devastation and carnage among their fellow mortals, not one in ten thousand has any interest in the quarrel, or any knowledge of the man against whom he lifts the fatal weapon, or has received any injury from him whom he devotes to destruction. They are by dint of power, urged into a bloody contest, in which they have no concern, and from which they expect no benefit. They are employed to destroy those who have never voluntarily harmed mankind, and who wish to enjoy the innocent retreats of peace.

The benevolent and discerning mind looks on the human race with compassion, and prays that the time may come, when light shall break forth and overspread the world; when truth shall arise and gain its just dominion; when tyranny shall withdraw its cruel hand and give place to equity and justice; and when all nations shall be united in bonds of friendship and peace.

The Apostle exhorts Christians especially to make supplication for *all saints.*"

Christians were then in a state of peculiar danger; either actually conflicting with, or imminently exposed to the violence of persecution. They were in a weak and defenceless state, not only without the support, but under the oppression of the powers of the world. They therefore needed the protection of Providence to preserve them from speedy destruction, and the influence of grace to fortify them against the temptations to apostasy.

Besides: The Christian institution was of infinite importance to the world. Hence to pray for the saints, for their support and for the spread of their religion,

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was to pray for the general virtue and happiness of the human race, in that and all succeeding ages.

If we believe the religion of the gospel to be true and important, we ought not only to profess and obey it ourselves, but also to contribute to its success and influence among others. There is, therefore, at all times, as well as in times of persecution, special reason why Christians in every place should make supplication for all saints. The Apostle says to the Thessalonians, "We pray always for you, that God would fulfil in you all the good pleasure of his goodness, and that the name of Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him. And pray ye for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course and be glorified, even as it is among you."

This leads me farther to observe, That the Apostle solicits the prayers of the Ephesian Christians for *himself*, as a *minister* of Christ. "Pray for *me*." Paul was a man of great natural abilities, and literary acquirements, of eminent grace and uncommon gifts; but he did not imagine that these raised him above the need of farther assistances and supplies. He prayed for himself, and he requested the prayers of his brethren. Humility becomes the most eminent saints. Improvements in grace conduce to lowliness of mind.

Christians ought to pray for their minister. Their edification and comfort, and the prevalence of piety in the rising generation much depend on his fidelity and success. When people complain of their minister's insufficiency or uselessness, it would be proper for them to inquire, whether they have done their duty to him and to themselves; whether they have attended on his ministry with constancy, received the word from him with meekness, assisted him by their concurrence, and remembered him in their prayers.

There was something special in Paul's case. He was "an ambassador in *bonds*." He was sent forth by God to treat with men on terms of peace. "We are



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ambassadors of Christ," says he, "as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God." You are to regard the ministers of Christ as his ambassadors. Your opposition to them in this character, is opposition to him: If you despise them, you despise him.

Among all nations, ambassadors, acting in their office, are considered as having a claim to personal security. But Paul, though an ambassador, was in bonds. The enemies of Christ had confined this messenger, to restrain him from delivering the message with which he was charged. He therefore requests the prayers of the saints, that he may be enlarged to go forth and proclaim to rebellious men the things which belong to their peace. People ought especially to help their minister by their prayers and charities, when he is under such worldly embarrassments as obstruct the free exercise of his office.

V. The Apostle points out the *manner*, in which he aimed, and all ministers ought to preach the gospel. "Pray for me, that utterance may be given me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, that I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak."

What Paul preached was "the *mystery* of the gospel"—the mystery which had been hidden from former ages, but was now made manifest. There are many doctrines of religion which could not be known without revelation, but appear easy to be understood, and reasonable to be believed, whenever they are discovered; as the incarnation and sacrifice of Christ, the pardoning mercy of God, the resurrection of the body and a future judgment. In reference to these the gospel is called a *mystery*—a mystery not kept secret, but made manifest to the sons of men.

The Apostle desired to make known this mystery. A minister should "use great plainness of speech, and

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by manifestation of the truth commend himself to every man's conscience in the sight of God." Addresses to the passions, when the mind is uninformed, are useless, and may be dangerous. Let the understanding first be enlightened in the knowledge of the truth; then the conscience and feelings may be addressed with propriety and advantage.

The Apostle prayed, "that he might speak *boldly* as he ought to speak."

In a minister *boldness* is necessary—not that impudent boldness, which assumes an unmerited superiority; but that pious fortitude, which dares to utter the important things of religion without reserve, and without fear of personal inconvenience. Paul declared the whole counsel of God. He never declined to speak, or studied to disguise the truth, that he might gain the favor, or escape the censure of the world; but still he was careful not to give needless offence, or awaken the dangerous opposition of passion and prejudice. His manner of address was respectful and winning; but not servile and fawning. He was bold without insolence, and delicate without disguise.

The minister must exhort and rebuke with all authority, and sometimes use sharpness: But he must not strive. He must be gentle toward all men, in meekness instructing them who oppose themselves, that they may come to repentance and the knowledge of the truth.

He must open his mouth boldly to declare the great doctrines of salvation, to confute dangerous errors, to convince gainsayers, to silence vain talkers, to testify against iniquity, to reprove the ungodly, and to detect and alarm selfdeluding hypocrites.

He must persevere in the faithful execution of his office, whatever discouragements may arise from the opposition of the world, the frowns of the great, the contempt of the proud, the want of concurrence, or the

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smallness of his success. The spirit which governs him must be, "not the spirit of bondage to fear, but the spirit of power, love and a sound mind."

His courage must be accompanied with prudence, humility and charity; not with rashness, pride and censoriousness: And his confidence must be grounded, not in a vain conceit of his own abilities; but *in* the goodness of his cause, the importance of truth and the support of divine grace.

We see that the office of a minister is difficult, as well as important. He may need more wisdom and fortitude than he possesses. As he should seek grace to guide and strengthen him, so he may reasonably expect a share in the intercessions of those for whom he labors. Whatever neglects they impute to him, if they forbear to mention him in their prayers, they may charge themselves with one criminal neglect.

We see that private Christians *should zealously* concur with their minister in his labors to *promote* religion. Their concurrence animates him to speak the word boldly. They should receive the word from him with readiness of mind, maintain religion in their houses, second his addresses to the young, preserve peace and order among themselves, and in their daily conversation hold forth the word of life, that he *may not* run in vain.

We see the vast importance of the gospel. Why has God appointed ministers to preach it? Why are they to speak it boldly? Why are they to instruct and reprove with all longsuffering? It is because the subject of it is great, and infinitely concerns the sons of men.

Now if it be a matter of such importance, can you safely neglect it? The minister who shuns to declare the counsel of God, you think, endangers his soul. Do not you endanger your own souls, when you reject this counsel? If it concerns a minister to labor for your

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salvation, ought you not to labor for your own ?—No pains taken by others will save you, while you disregard your own duty. Awake then to consideration and repentance ; attend on God's word and apply with diligence all the means in your hands. Seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him, while he is near.

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# SERMON XLIX.

## *Paul's Intention in sending Tychicus to Ephesus.*

EPHESIANS vi. 21, 22, 23.

*But that ye may know my affairs, and how I do, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, shall make known to you all things; whom I have sent unto you for this same purpose, that ye might know our affairs, and that he might comfort your hearts. Peace be to the brethen, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

THE Apostle in the preceding verse, says, that, "for the gospel's sake, he was an ambassador in bonds." He was appointed an ambassador of Christ to publish the gospel of peace to a guilty world. In the execution of this commission he was apprehended and put in chains. The place of his confinement was the city of Rome. From thence he wrote to several churches, and particularly to the church of the Ephesians, among whom he had before spent some time in preaching the gospel. His letter to this church he sent by the hand of Tychicus, who was not only a Christian, but a minister, and an assistant to Paul in the work of the gospel. In his letter he mentions this messenger by name, informs the Ephesians for what purpose he had sent him, and recommends him to

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them as a beloved brother and faithful minister. He then expresses the benevolent desires of his heart, that God would grant them peace and love, as the fruits of that faith, which they professed in Christ Jesus.

The paragraph now read I shall improve in several observations.

I. Paul was careful to keep up an intercourse and communion with the churches of Christ.

While he was at Rome, he sent a brother to carry a message to the Ephesians. By the same hand he sent a letter to the Colossians. He directed that the same letter should be read to the church in Laodicea; and that they also should read the letter from Laodicea. He inscribed this letter "to the saints in Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus."

We hence learn, that there ought to be a fellowship and correspondence among the churches of Christ. They should all unite their endeavors for the common edification and comfort.

The church of Christ is one. And though for the convenience of social worship, it is formed into various societies, yet it is not divided. It is still one body; and all its several members, as there is occasion and opportunity, should conspire to the promotion of the general peace and happiness. Different churches, like the different members of the body, should act in concert, and move as being animated by the same spirit. If one suffers, others should contribute to its relief; if one is honored, all should partake in the joy.

We are to acknowledge all as our brethren, who, in every place, call on the name of Jesus Christ the Lord, both theirs and ours. We should be free, as to commune with other churches, so to admit them to communion with us, statedly or occasionally, as circumstances allow. We should seek the counsel of sister churches under our difficulties; and be ready, when requested, to afford them our counsel under theirs.

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Thus we should keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace, and be fellow helpers to the truth.

We see then, that such as form themselves into separate societies, with a view to withdraw themselves from the communion of other churches, and to exclude other churches from theirs, essentially depart from the pacific and benevolent plan of the gospel.

II. Paul was solicitous, that the Christians, among whom he had preached, should "know his state."

He sent to the Ephesians a messenger, from whom they might know his affairs. And what were his affairs?—He was a prisoner of Jesus Christ in the cause of the gospel. He was in bonds; but still he maintained his faith and courage. He was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, nor afraid to avow his belief of it, though bonds, afflictions and death might be the consequence.

He sent to the Christian churches *an* account of his state, that they might be moved to pray for *him*—might know how to accommodate their prayers to his case—might not be terrified by his sufferings, but rather emboldened by his example of fortitude—and that his instructions and exhortations might come with greater power, being written in a state of affliction, and dictated by that spirit which supported him *in all his* tribulation.

It is often proper for Christians to communicate to each other their inward and outward troubles, that they may enjoy the benefit of each other's advice and prayers.

It concerns Christians under afflictions, especially under trials on account of religion, to maintain a constancy and fortitude, which may do honor to religion, and recommend it to the choice and esteem of others.

III. Paul sent to inform the Ephesians, not only what were his affairs, but "what he was doing"—how he employed himself in his confinement.

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He suffered not his time to pass in restless impatience, or useless indolence. He knew how to be contented in bonds: He could still be active in promoting the cause of Christ, and the salvation of men. He received all who came to him, and preached to them the kingdom of God and the things which concerned the Lord Jesus with all confidence. He instructed his fellow prisoners, and, in some instances, was so happy as to reclaim them from a vicious life, and bring them to the faith of the gospel. It was at Rome, in his bonds, that he recovered Onesimus from a profligate course, and made him, who in time past had been unprofitable, now profitable to all who were connected with him. He spent much of his time in prayer for the churches. He says, "He prayed for them always —without ceasing—night and day." He was industrious in writing to the churches, and to particular persons. Several of his epistles, besides this, were written, when he was in bonds. His confinement turned to the furtherance of the gospel, as it gave occasion for a number of most excellent epistles, which are of standing use and importance in the churches. If Paul had only preached, we should, at this time, scarcely have known what he did preach. We should not have been favored with those books, which are some of the most instructive parts of holy scripture. The wisdom of God disposes things in such a manner, as leads to the accomplishment of his own purposes.

Time so piously and usefully spent, as Paul's time was, may be pleasant, even in a prison. He was willing the churches should know what he did. He was not ashamed that his manner of life should be made public. Do not many so spend their time, that they are almost ashamed to review it themselves; and would be more ashamed to let *others* know, what they do?

Paul's example teaches us, that we should do good in every condition. Even confinement excuses not



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from works of piety and beneficence. Under particular circumstances we may be incapable of the services, which we wish to perform; but perhaps, under these circumstances, we may do more good, than if we were in that condition of life, which we think most eligible, and most favorable to our usefulness. Let us only be solicitous to do good, in every state, according to our ability; and thus leave it with God to order our affairs, as his wisdom sees best.

IV. When Paul sends Tychicus to Ephesus, and to Colossee, he gives him written testimonials, that he might be received of the churches, in the character of a minister. "I send Tychicus, who is a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord."

If you read, with attention, the Acts, and the Epistles of the apostles, you will find, that they who undertook to preach the gospel, were approved and separated to that work by men already in office; *and that* these preachers, when they travelled abroad, carried with them written recommendations from some known apostle, minister, or church. This precaution was taken, that the churches might not be imposed upon by ignorant pretenders, or artful deceivers.

This early example teaches us, that, whenever ministers go forth to preach the gospel, in places where their names and characters are unknown, they ought to exhibit proper evidences of their authority to preach, and of their good standing in the church of Christ; and that, without such evidences, they ought not to be received in that sacred character. The church of Ephesus is commended, because she tried them, who said they were apostles and were not, and found them liars. On the contrary, the church of Thyatira is reproved, because she suffered those to teach, who called themselves prophets, but could produce no testimony in support of their character. The consequence of this credulity and negligence was, that these pretended

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prophets seduced the servants of Christ from the purity and order of the gospel.

The church of Christ is a regular, organized community. The work of ministers is to build up this community in knowledge, peace and holiness. The qualifications for the ministry, the manner of introduction to the office, and the duties which belong to it, the gospel has clearly stated. We are to receive none as ambassadors of Christ, but those who come to us, according to the order which he has settled. All are not teachers in his church: He has given *some* to be teachers. We are not to suppose, that every man, at his own pleasure, may assume the office, or that we are to acknowledge in the office, every man who does assume it. If any man offers himself to us in the character of a Christian teacher, on *him* it is incumbent to exhibit proof of his Christian standing and official authority. If we give heed to every vain pretender, and countenance every bold intruder, we bring confusion into the church, where all things ought to be done decently and in order.

V. The ministers of Christ ought to act in concert and unite their labors in building up his kingdom.

Tychicus cooperates with Paul in the work of the ministry; Paul therefore sends him to the churches to which he himself had ministered, and calls him a faithful minister and fellow servant in the Lord.

There ought to be, among ministers, unity of affection, correspondence of design, and concurrence of labors. There should be no contention for superiority; no undermining arts; no attempts to magnify their importance at the expense of their brethrens' usefulness. Paul would not enter into the labors, or build on the foundation of other men. He would not stretch himself beyond his line. But then, in an orderly way, he would impart to, and receive from his brethren, all proper assistance in promoting the common cause. Ministers should strengthen the hands, and animate the

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hearts of one another, and thus be fellow helpers to the truth.

VI. *Fidelity* is an essential part of the ministerial character. Paul says of Tychicus, "He is a *faithful* minister."—"It is required in stewards, that a man be found *faithful*." Timothy is charged to "commit the things which he had received, unto *faithful* men."

The faithful minister undertakes his work with pure intentions and abides in it with constancy, even though he may meet with worldly discouragements. His governing aim is to approve himself to God, and promote the essential interest of his fellow men. He applies himself to the various duties of his office with assiduity and diligence. He shuns not to declare the whole counsel of God. He handles not the word of God deceitfully, but uses great plainness of speech, and, by manifestation of the truth, commends himself to the consciences of his hearers. Such a faithful pastor, when the great shepherd shall appear, *will receive* the crown of life. Though his people should not be gathered, yet he will be glorious in the eyes of the Lord, and his God will be his strength.

VII. Paul sent Tychicus to the Ephesians, "that he might comfort their hearts."

The Apostle was in bonds for the gospel. Apprehensive, that these new converts might by his sufferings be discouraged in their religion, and turned away from their profession, he sends this messenger to animate and confirm them. He says in the third chapter, "I Paul, the prisoner of the Lord for you Gentiles—desire that ye faint not at my tribulation for you, which is your glory. For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that he would grant you to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man"—"I the prisoner of the Lord beseech you, that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called."—Tychicus was sent on the same design, to comfort them under their grief for Paul's

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imprisonment, and to guard them against any discouraging apprehensions from so unhappy an event.

Ministers are to strengthen new converts and young professors to constancy and perseverance in religion, by laying before them the comforting and animating motives of the gospel.

Christians often meet with discouragements from external afflictions—from the pressure of temptations—from the strength of inward corruptions—from a consciousness of infirmity—from their unsuccessfulness in striving against sin—from the want of bright evidences of their sincerity—from the coldness of their hearts in spiritual duties—and from the inconstaney of their good resolutions.—We are to comfort despondiag souls, not by bold pretensions to know their spiritual state and their title to heaven, but by proposing to them those scriptural marks and characters, by which they may prove their own hearts, and judge their own state. We are to put them in the way to obtain comfort, by assisting them in the trial of themselves, and by encouraging them to diligence and perseverance in religion. We are to lead their minds to the contemplation of the divine promises, and to instruct them how they may apply these promises to themselves. We are to remind them of the abundant grace of God, and invite their approach to his throne for grace to help in time of need. We are especially to animate and strengthen them from the particular promises, made to those who patiently continue in well doing.

Ministers should apply the comforts and terrors of the gospel to the proper characters; and direct their hearers, on a strict examination of their own hearts, to make the application for themselves. If we take upon us to apply promises or threatenings to *persons* instead of characters, we shall often misapply them, or if we give a false description of religion, we shall lead our hearers to misapply them. Thus we shall bring on ourselves the curse denounced against those corrupt

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teachers, "who with their lies make the hearts of the righteous sad, whom God hath not made sad; and who strengthen the hands of the wicked, that he return not from his wicked way, by promising him life."

Finally: The Apostle here points out the way in which Christians are to receive religious comfort. They are to abound in that peace and love, which are the fruits of faith. "Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith from God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ."

They had already professed their *faith* in the gospel of Christ. The Apostle prays, that, with their faith, there might be *peace* and *love*. These are the genuine effects of true faith, and from these spring religious comfort and joy. For the Thessalonian believers Paul gives thanks, "remembering their work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope." Where faith works, love will also labor, and hope will patiently wait for a reward. As faith increases, love will abound, and hope be strengthened. Hence the Apostle prays, "The Lord make you to increase and abound in love toward one another, and toward all men, to the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

"The end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, a good conscience and faith unfeigned." The gospel by its precepts enjoins, by its examples recommends, and by its doctrines urges mutual love, as the noblest branch of the Christian temper; and faith captivates the soul into obedience to the gospel by giving efficacy to its precepts, examples and doctrines. Love is so essential to the religion of Christ, that where it is wanting, all pretensions to faith are vain. They who by Christ have believed in God, are said "to have purified their souls unto unfeigned love of the brethren."

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Where faith operates, love will appear, and *peace* will follow.

Love first produces *inward* peace. It extinguishes malice, envy, hatred, wrath, revenge, and every unfriendly passion—every unsocial feeling. It operates by meekness under provocations—by the forgiveness of injuries—by condescension in cases of controversy—by compassion to the afflicted—by beneficence to the needy—by righteousness in dealings—by tenderness of mens' characters—by joy in the prosperity of neighbors, and by a promptitude in relieving the distresses and promoting the happiness of mankind.

Such are the works and fruits of love; and where this prevails there will be peace in the mind. Of consequence, when this grace reigns among Christians, there will be *social* peace. They will bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ. They will be careful not to give offence, either by real injuries, or unnecessary differences—by obstinacy in their own opinions, or a contemptuous treatment of the opinions of others. They will be slow to take offence. They will not credulously suspect, or suddenly resent injuries, nor magnify into crimes their neighbors' trivial errors. If a variance happens, they will be forward to make peace, by explaining their misconstrued behavior—by retracting their exceptionable words or actions—by listening to overtures of accommodation—by accepting reasonable concessions—and by exercising forbearance, where a diversity of sentiment remains. They will use their friendly offices to compose differences among others, and to turn away the anger which awakens contention. They will studiously avoid that open talebearing, and that secret whispering which often separates the nearest friends.

Thus love produces peace, first in the breast where it dwells, and then in the society where it reigns.

This spirit of love brings religious comfort.

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Love is comfortable in its immediate feelings, and in its pacific influence. The Apostle says, "If there be any comfort of love, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be like minded." The pleasures of society spring from peace and love.

Love brings comfort to the soul, as it is an evidence of godly sincerity. "By this we know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren."—"By this shall mankind know that we are Christ's disciples, because we love one another." "*In* this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: Whosoever doth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother." "Let us love, not in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth—hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before God."

If we would enjoy the comfort, we must maintain the temper of religion. To look for *religious comfort* in any other way, is contrary to the design of the gospel. And comfort that comes in any other way, is delusive any transient. The joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment.

Peace and love come from God. They are the fruits of his Spirit. While we attend to the precepts and doctrines of the gospel for instruction in, and excitement to our duty, we must pray for the work of the divine Spirit in our souls, to form them more and more to the temper of peace and love, and thus to fill them with hope and joy.

The wisdom, which is pure, peaceable, gentle, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, is wisdom from above. If we lack wisdom, let us ask it of God, who giveth liberally and upbraideth not; remembering, that every good gift, and every perfect gift cometh down from above, from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, nor shadow of turning.

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If we of his good will have been begotten by the word of truth, it is that we may be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures. Let us therefore be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God. And let us lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the ingrafted word, which is able to save our souls.

Thus may peace and love with faith be multiplied to us, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ——*Amen.*



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# SERMON L.

## *Sincere Love to Christ.*

EPHESIANS vi. 24.

*Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.*

ST. PAUL, though a man of *liberal education*, seems not to have been expert in writing the Greek characters; for which reason he usually employed an amanuensis. He speaks of it as something extraordinary for him to write, with his own hand, a letter so large as that to the Galatians. But though he usually dictated his letters to a Scribe, yet he *always* took care to subjoin to them, with his own hand, a form of salutation, by which the genuineness of them was ascertained. His second epistle to the Thessalonians he thus concludes, "The salutation of Paul, *with mine own hand*," a hand well known, or easy to be known by comparing it with his other writings, "which is the token in every letter so I write: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you." When this salutation, in Paul's hand, was seen at the close of an epistle, it was known that the epistle was from him.

As Paul, so doubtless the other sacred writers, took immediate care to prove their works to be genuine, and to prevent spurious writings from being palmed on

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the churches under their names. Hence we may conclude, that the churches from the beginning, had sufficient evidence, that the sacred books were written by the men, whose names they bear.

The books of the New Testament appear to have been written in the time when their reputed authors lived. They were at that time publicly known and received as the genuine works of those men. They were acknowledged as such in the next age, both by friends and enemies. They have been conveyed to us by an uninterrupted series of vouchers. They must therefore be regarded as the genuine works of the men, to whom they are ascribed.

This signature, which Paul affixes to his epistles, speaks the goodness and benevolence of his heart. "The love of Christ be with you all." But while he wishes to all the grace of Christ for their eternal salvation, he reminds them, that in order to obtain this grace, they must love the author of it in sincerity. "If any man love not our Lord Jesus Christ, he will be accursed when the Lord shall come."

Our text leads us to consider, in what respects Christ is an *object* of our love—what it is to love him *in sincerity*—how a sincere love to Christ will *discover* itself—and the *benediction* connected with this love.

I. We will consider on what accounts Christ is entitled to our love.

Love, which is the inclination and attachment of the soul toward an object, supposes an apprehension of something which is good and excellent in that object.

Jesus Christ once dwelt on earth, and there were those who saw him and beheld his glory. But he is now gone to the invisible world, and we behold him only by faith: And the ground of our faith is the exhibition made of him in the gospel.

Christ is a *divine* person. The scripture calls him "the true God;" ascribes to him divine perfections and works, and pays him religious honors. Love to

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him, in this view of him, is the same as love to God; for, in respect of his divine nature, "He and the Father are one."

The gospel teaches us, that "God was manifest in the flesh"—that "the word was made flesh, and dwelt with men"—that "in Christ dwelt the fullness of the godhead bodily." In the *man* Christ Jesus, appeared every virtuous quality which can dignify and adorn human nature. Benevolence, humility, condescension, patience, resignation, fortitude, contempt of the world and a heavenly conversation, were conspicuous in his character. In this view he is an object worthy of our love: And love, regarding him in this character, is the same as love to our fellow Christians, only with the difference resulting from the want of that perfection in them, which we contemplate in him.

The Apostle says, "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, *who is in* the bosom of the Father, hath declared him." As God *is a Spirit* invisible to the eye of sense, we can have no direct view of him: But in Jesus Christ, who became man, the divine character is rendered visible. An immediate display of the glory of God would overpower our feeble nature: In Christ the glory of God shines upon us in a soft and gentle light, being kindly *mitigated* in passing through the veil of his flesh. He is "the mighty God:" But as he appears in human flesh, the terrors of divinity are prevented. He, as God, is full of power and justice; but, as man, he can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities. As God, he is infinitely above us; but as man, he is familiar to us. The bright beams of divine glory, thus blended with the softer rays of human virtue, exhibit to our view an object of peculiar amiableness and delight.

Farther: Christ's mediatorial offices entitle him to our love.

A sense of our wants adds worth to an object suited to relieve them. An apprehension of our guilty and

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helpless condition in ourselves, will lead us to esteem and admire Christ in the character of a Redeemer. When Paul perceived the vanity of that righteousness of his own, in which once he trusted, he could suffer the loss of all things to win Christ, and be found in him.

Jesus is such a Saviour as we need. His offices and powers are adapted to our weaknesses and necessities. Conscious of guilt, we may rely on his atonement for pardon. Surrounded with enemies, we may apply to his power for protection. Pressed with affliction, we may lean on his grace for support. Feeling our weakness, we may repair to his throne for help. Sensible of our unworthiness, we may come before God in his name. It hath pleased the Father, that in him all fullness should dwell; and of his fullness we may all receive even grace for grace. In this view of Christ, as a sufficient and suitable Saviour, love operates by complacence and joy.

Again: Christ is an object of our love on account of his kindness to us. "We love him, because he first loved us." "We know his grace, that, though he was rich, yet for our sakes he became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich." When we contemplate this heavenly friend, early covenanting with the Father to make his soul an offering for sin, and in the fulness of time assuming our nature, submitting to labor and sorrow, enduring the contradiction of sinners, bearing our sins in his body, suffering a dreadful death in our place, rising from the dead and ascending to heaven as our forerunner and intercessor, shall we not admire such high and unexampled goodness? "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive honor, and glory, and blessing, for he hath redeemed us to God by his blood." Love contemplating Christ as a divine benefactor, operates in a way of gratitude and hope.

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II. The Apostle inserts an essential qualification of love to Christ, which is *sincerity*.

The sincerity of our love implies, that it be real, universal, supreme, persevering and active.

Our love to Christ must be *real*, not pretended. There are some, who, while they profess to esteem him, are in heart enemies to him. True love is a temper conformed to his gospel, and assimilated to his character. While the love of sin reigns in us, we shall not embrace him as one who came to save us from sin. As a Saviour from misery he may appear desirable, but as a Saviour from sin he is lovely to those only who hate sin, and long for deliverance from it.

Our love to Christ must be *universal*; it must respect his whole character. Many, when they consider him as one who came to ransom the guilty from destruction, rejoice in him, and are pleased with the thought, that such a Saviour has appeared. But when they view him as the ruler and judge of men, as one who commands all men to repent, who has revealed the wrath of God against all impenitent sinners; their hearts rise against him, and their inward language is, "We will not have this man to reign over us." The true believer regards and loves Christ in the view in which the gospel exhibits him, not only as a redeemer from misery, but as a teacher of righteousness; not only as a propitiation for sin, but as a pattern of holiness. He not only appreciates Christ's gracious promises, but justifies his awful threatenings; and he desires as well to be sanctified from his pollutions by the influence of Christ's grace, as to be saved from wrath by the merit of his blood.

Sincere love to Christ is *supreme*. It gives him the preference to all earthly interests and connexions. Thus the Saviour himself has taught us, "He that loveth father or mother, son or daughter more than me, is not worthy of me."—"If any man come to me, and hate not," or do not comparatively disesteem "his

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father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple." We must love Christ more than these.

Sincere love is *persevering*. It holds out against temptations, lives amidst worldly cares and operates in times of affliction. It is a flame, which waters cannot quench, nor floods drown. They whom Christ owns as his disciples, are such as continue in his love —such as abide in him, and have his word abiding in them.

Finally: True love to Christ is *active*. It is not a cold and indolent opinion of him; but such a sensible regard to him as interests the heart, and influences the life. There is "the labor of love," as well as "the work of faith." I proceed to shew,

III. How sincere love to Christ will *discover* itself.

This will make us careful to *please* him. Our obedience is the proper evidence of a regard for his character. "If a man love me," says he, "he will keep my sayings: He that loveth me not, keepeth not my words. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."

This holy principle will be accompanied with *humility*. When we discern the amiableness of Christ's character, we shall think soberly of our own. When we see what human nature was in him, we shall be ashamed to think, what it is in us. Our value for his favor will awaken a cautious fear, lest we fail of it. Paul, under the influence of this principle, was jealous of himself, lest by any means he should be a castaway.

We are fond of *imitating* those whom we love. If we love Christ, we shall follow his steps, and walk as he walked.

Our love to him will animate us to promote his interest, and oppose his enemies. He has purchased a church with his blood. For the sake of this he is made head over all things. The enlargement of his

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church, the increase of converts to his religion, the spread and influence of his gospel, the promotion of knowledge and holiness, peace and charity, and the suppression of wickedness and error, are interests which he much regards. To advance these interests, we are to be workers together with him. We are to profess our submission to his government, and belief of his gospel. We are to bear testimony against the corrupt opinions and practices of the world. We are to employ our influence for the reformation and enlargement of his kingdom, and for the encouragement and confirmation of those who would join themselves to it. We are to study the things which make for peace, and by which we may edify one another. Thus we are to express our love to the Saviour. When Peter professed his love, Christ said to him, "Feed my lambs—feed my sheep."

We are to shew our love to the *Saviour by doing good* to his needy *brethren* and *friends*. These we have always with us, and whensoever we will, we may do them good. And the good which we do to them, he will accept as done to himself. And the smallest charity performed in his name, will in no wise lose its reward.

This principle will express itself in a devout *attendance* on his *ordinances*, especially on that which he instituted to awaken and perpetuate the remembrance of his dying love. As absent friends delight to reciprocate tokens of fidelity and affection, so the sincere disciples of Jesus love to maintain a correspondence with him by a religious observance of his day, and a pious celebration of his worship. They rejoice with those who say, "Come let us go up to the house of the Lord; he will teach us his ways, and we will walk in his paths." They love the assemblies of the saints, because Christ has promised, that he will be in the midst of them.

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Love often looks beyond this world to that glorious state where the Redeemer is gone, and anticipates the happiness to be enjoyed in his presence. It is a part of the character of the saints, that "they love his appearing and kingdom, have their conversation in heaven, and thence look and wait for the Saviour." Love to him will indeed make us willing to abide in the flesh, as long as his service requires; and while our minds are clouded with doubts, we shall choose to abide, because we fear the consequence of a departure. But whatever interests call our attention to this world, and whatever fears darken our passage to the other, still, if love reigns and operates in us, we shall esteem it good to be with Christ; we shall long for brighter displays of his glory, and stronger evidence of our sincerity; we shall aspire toward heaven, shall give diligence to the full assurance of hope, and follow them, who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

These are the genuine operations of love to Christ.

IV. We will consider the *benediction* connected with this temper. It is called *grace*, a term of large and glorious import. It comprehends all the blessings, which the gospel reveals to the sons of men, and promises to the faithful in Christ.

One great privilege contained in this grace is *justification* before God. Through faith, which works by love, we are justified freely by grace; and being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Another privilege is the *presence* of the *Divine Spirit*. Christ says to his disciples, "If ye love me, keep my commandments, and I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another comforter, even the Spirit of truth whom the Father will send in my name. He shall abide with you forever."—The Spirit often makes his visits to sinners in a way of conviction and awakening. Hence Christ says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice and open the



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door, I will come in to him." But with those who love him he makes his *abode*, to comfort them in their afflictions, guide them in their doubts, assist them in their duties, and preserve them through all their dangers unto eternal life. Christ has promised, They *shall* never perish, and none *shall* pluck them out of his hands."

They who love Christ have *free access* to the throne of grace, and a promise that they shall be heard and accepted there. "By him they have access by faith into that grace, in which they stand."—If they abide in him, they may ask what they will, and it shall be done unto them." We must remember, however, that there is a limitation of the promise. "If we ask any thing *according to his will*, he heareth us; and if he hear us whatsoever we ask, we have the petitions which we desire of him."

Finally: They who love Christ *in* sincerity, will receive the gift of a *happy immortality*. There *is* a crown of life, which the Lord has promised to them, who love him—a crown of righteousness, which he will give to all who love his appearing. This grace passes all understanding. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man the things, which God hath prepared for them who love him."

How happy are the souls who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity! They are delivered from the wrath to come. They are redeemed from the curse of the law. They are within the protection of divine grace and under the security of an immutable promise. They will, indeed, meet with afflictions, while they are in the flesh; but all things are working for their good, and nothing will separate them from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus their Lord.

This happiness is not confined to any particular family, nation or age, but extended to all who love the Redeemer. In him there is no distinction of Jew or

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Gentile, male or female, bond or free; but all are one in him.

When a certain person, hearing Jesus teach, exclaimed, "Blessed is she who bare thee," he replied, "Yea, rather blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it." In his character as a Saviour, he gave no preference to his relatives according to the flesh; but declared, "Whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister and mother."

Let us often place the Lord Jesus before our eyes, and contemplate his Spirit, doctrines and works, his sufferings, resurrection and intercession. Let us view him as represented in his word and in his ordinances, and by frequent converse with him increase and strengthen our love to him.

Let us prove the sincerity of our love by obeying his precepts, promoting his interest, imitating his example, encouraging his friends, opposing his enemies, and attending on his ordinances. And let us remember, that it is not merely by calling him our Lord, and by eating and drinking in his presence, but rather by doing his will, that we prove the sincerity of our love, and ascertain our title to his kingdom.

## CONCLUSION.

I have now finished that series of discourses, which I proposed to deliver to you upon this rich and excellent Epistle of Paul to the Ephesians. I have endeavored to explain such passages as seemed obscure, have marked the connexion of one part with another, and have pointed out the instructions which the epistle itself naturally suggested. I have aimed to give Paul's sentiments in a plain and familiar manner, and to introduce *him* into the pulpit preaching the same gospel, which he preached in Ephesus.

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In the course of these meditations, all the great doctrines and duties of the Christian system have come in our way; for the epistle is a compendium of the gospel. It teaches us the fall and apostasy of man, and God's purpose concerning his redemption; the character of the Redeemer, and the manner in which he executed his work; the operation of the divine Spirit in applying this redemption; the nature and design of the Christian church, and of the gospel ministry; the various duties which we owe to God, to Jesus Christ, to the Divine Spirit, to mankind, to our fellow Christians, and to ourselves; how we should regard the things of this world, and the things of the world to come; how we should conduct in our secular calling and in all the particular relations of life; how we should behave in times of affliction and temptation; and how we may enjoy the comforts of religion here, and secure the rewards of it hereafter.

It becomes us to inquire, what improvement we have made in knowledge and piety, while we have been attending to this epistle, and whether we have more deeply imbibed the spirit and sentiment, which it has poured upon us.

In order to the recollection of what we have heard, it may be useful, that we sit down, and read over this epistle with close attention and self application, with fervent prayer for the guidance of that Spirit, which leads into all truth, and with humble concern, that our hearts may be moulded into the temper here described.

And God grant, that we may abound more and more in knowledge and in all judgment, that we may approve the things which are excellent, and may be sincere and without offence until the day of Christ.——AMEN.

*FINIS.*

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